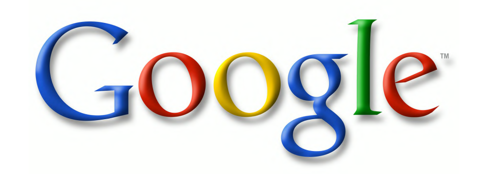
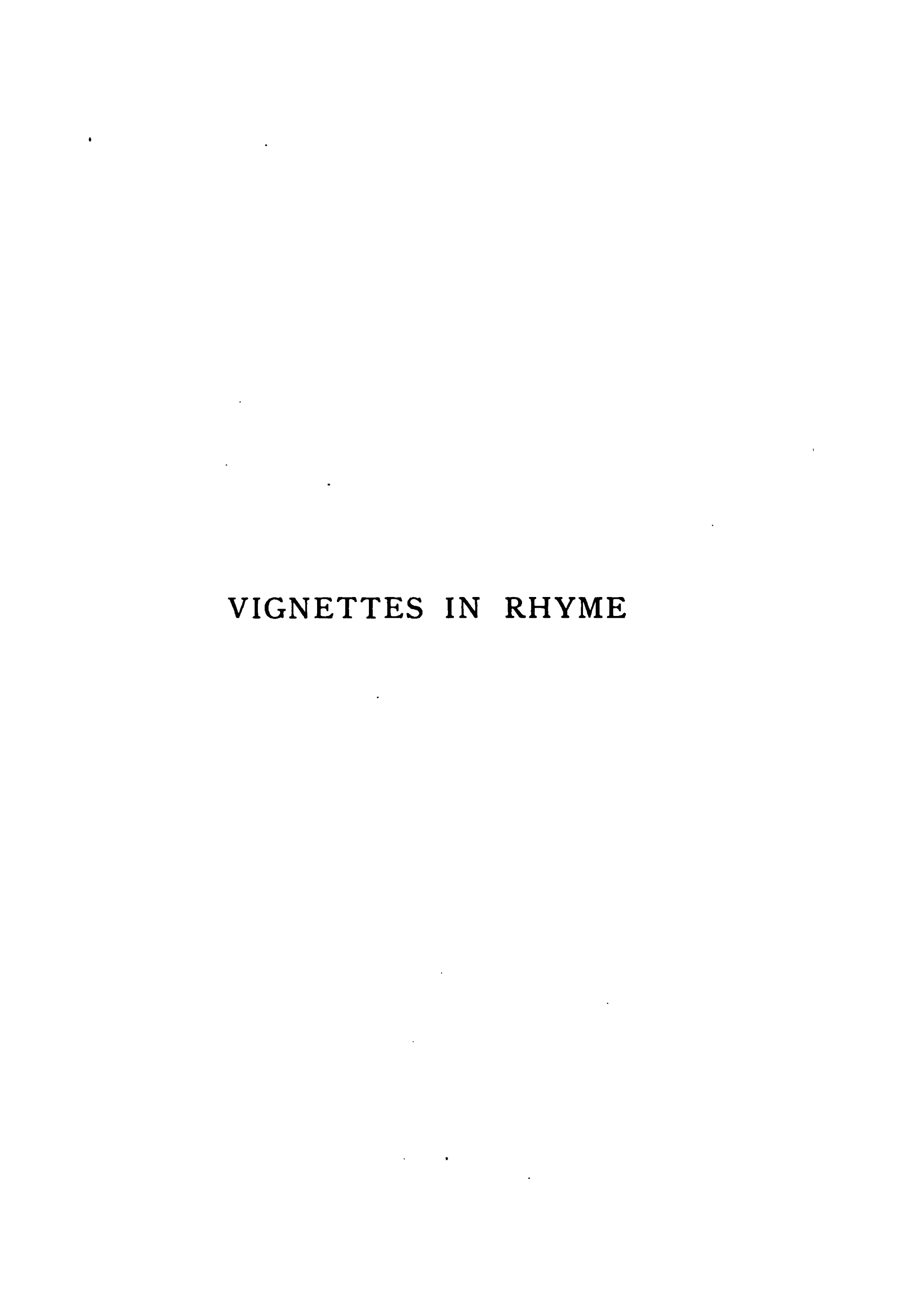



VIGNETTES
IN RHYME







VIGNETTES IN RHYME

SOME NOTICES OF THE FIRST EDITION.

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VIGNETTES IN RHYME

AND VERS DE SOCIÉTÉ

BY

AUSTIN DOBSON

SECOND EDITION.

HENRY S. KING & CO.,
65 CORNHILL AND 12 PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.
1874.


BODLEIAN
1913
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TO

ANTHONY TROLLOPE,

THESE VERSES

ARE GRATEFULLY INSCRIBED.

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A DEAD LETTER.

'*A cœur blessé—l'ombre et le silence.*'—H. DE BALZAC.

I.

I DREW it from its china tomb;—
  It came out stained and dusky,
Still haunted by some thin perfume
  That, years ago, was musky.

An old, old letter,—folded still!
  To read with due composure
I sought the sun-lit window-sill
  Above the gray enclosure,

A

That, glimmering in the sultry haze,
  Faint-flowered, dimly shaded,
Slumbered, like Goldsmith's Madam Blaize,
  Bedizened and brocaded.

A queer old place! You 'd surely say
  Some tea-board garden-maker
Had planned it in Dutch William's day
  To please some florist Quaker,

So trim it was. The yew-trees still,
  With pious care perverted,
Grew in the same grim shapes; and still
  The lipless dolphin spurted;

Still in his wonted state abode
  The broken-nosed Apollo;
And still the cypress-arbour showed
  The same umbrageous hollow.

Only,—as fresh young Beauty gleams
  From coffee-coloured laces,—
So peeped from its old-fashioned dreams
  The fresher modern traces;

For idle mallet, hoop, and ball
  Upon the lawn were lying;
A magazine, a tumbled shawl,
  Round which the swifts were flying;

And, tossed beside the Guelder rose,
  A heap of rainbow knitting,
Where, blinking in her pleased repose,
  A Persian cat was sitting.

'A place to love in,—live,—for aye,
  If we too, like Tithonus,
Could find some God to stretch the gray,
  Scant life the Fates have thrown us;

'But now by steam we run our race
With buttoned heart and pocket;
Our Love 's a gilded, surplus grace,—
Just like an empty locket.

'"The time is out of joint." Who will,
May strive to make it better;
For me, this warm old window-sill,
And this old dusty letter.'

II.

'Dear *John* (the letter ran), it can't, can't be,
For Father 's gone to *Chorley Fair* with *Sam*,
And Mother 's storing Apples,—*Prue* and Me
Up to our Elbows making Damson Jam:
But we shall meet before a Week is gone,—
"'Tis a long Lane that has no Turning," *John!*

'Only till Sunday next, and then you 'll wait
Behind the White-Thorn, by the broken Stile—
We can go round and catch them at the Gate,
All to ourselves, for nearly one long Mile;
Dear *Prue* won't look, and Father he 'll go on,
And *Sam's* two Eyes are all for *Cissy, John!*

'*John*, she 's so smart,—with every Ribbon new,
Flame-coloured Sack, and Crimson Padesoy;
As proud as proud; and has the Vapours too,
Just like My Lady;—calls poor *Sam* a Boy,
And vows no Sweet-Heart 's worth the Thinking-on
Till he 's past Thirty,—I know better, *John!*

'My dear, I don't think that I thought of much
Before we knew each other, I and you;
And now, why, *John*, your least, least Finger-touch,
Gives me enough to think a Summer through.

See, for I send you Something! There, 'tis gone!
Look in this corner,—mind you find it, *John!*'

III.

This was the matter of the note,—
  A long-forgot deposit,
Dropped in an Indian dragon's throat,
  Deep in a fragrant closet,

Piled with a dapper Dresden world,—
  Beaux, beauties, prayers, and poses,—
Bonzes with squat legs undercurled,
  And great jars filled with roses.

Ah, heart that wrote! Ah, lips that kissed!
  You had no thought or presage
Into what keeping you dismissed
  Your simple old-world message!

A reverent one. Though we to-day
  Distrust beliefs and powers,
The artless, ageless things you say
  Are fresh as May's own flowers,

Starring some pure primeval spring,
  Ere Gold had grown despotic,—
Ere Life was yet a selfish thing,
  Or Love a mere exotic.

I need not search too much to find
  Whose lot it was to send it,
That feel upon me yet the kind,
  Soft hand of her who penned it;

And see, through two-score years of smoke,
  In bygone, quaint apparel,
Shine from yon time-black Norway oak
  The face of Patience Caryl,—

The pale, smooth forehead, silver-tressed;
  The gray gown, primly flowered;
The spotless, stately coif whose crest
  Like Hector's horse-plume towered;

And still the sweet half-solemn look
  Where some past thought was clinging,
As when one shuts a serious book
  To hear the thrushes singing.

I kneel to you! Of those you were,
  Whose kind old hearts grow mellow,—
Whose fair old faces grow more fair
  As Point and Flanders yellow;

Whom some old store of garnered grief,
  Their placid temples shading,
Crowns like a wreath of autumn leaf
  With tender tints of fading.

Peace to your soul! You died unwed—
  Despite this loving letter.
And what of John? The less that's said
  Of John, I think, the better.

A GENTLEMAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL.

I.

He lived in that past Georgian day,
When men were less inclined to say
That 'Time is Gold,' and overlay
With toil their pleasure;
He held some land, and dwelt thereon,—
Where, I forget,—the house is gone;
His Christian name, I think, was John,—
His surname, Leisure.

II.

Reynolds has painted him,—a face
Filled with a fine, old-fashioned grace,
Fresh-coloured, frank, with ne'er a trace
Of trouble shaded;
The eyes are blue, the hair is drest
In plainest way,—one hand is prest
Deep in a flapped canary vest,
With buds brocaded.

III.

He wears a brown old Brunswick coat,
With silver buttons,—round his throat,
A soft cravat;—in all you note
An elder fashion,—
A strangeness, which, to us who shine
In shapely hats,—whose coats combine
All harmonies of hue and line,
Inspires compassion.

IV.

He lived so long ago, you see;
Men were untravelled then, but we,
Like Ariel, post o'er land and sea
With careless parting;
He found it quite enough for him
To smoke his pipe in 'garden trim,'
And watch, about the fish-tank's brim,
The swallows darting.

V.

He liked the well-wheel's creaking tongue,—
He liked the thrush that stopped and sung,—
He liked the drone of flies among
His netted peaches;
He liked to watch the sunlight fall
Athwart his ivied orchard wall;
Or pause to catch the cuckoo's call
Beyond the beeches.

VI.

His were the times of Paint and Patch,
And yet no Ranelagh could match
The sober doves that round his thatch
Spread tails and sidled;
He liked their ruffling, puffed content,—
For him their drowsy wheelings meant
More than a Mall of Beaux that bent,
Or Belles that bridled.

VII.

Not that, in truth, when life began
He shunned the flutter of the fan;
He too had maybe 'pinked his man'
In Beauty's quarrel;
But now his 'fervent youth' had flown
Where lost things go; and he was grown
As staid and slow-paced as his own
Old hunter, Sorrel.

VIII.

Yet still he loved the chase, and held
That no composer's score excelled
The merry horn, when Sweetlip swelled
Its jovial riot;
But most his measured words of praise
Caressed the angler's easy ways,—
His idly meditative days,—
His rustic diet.

IX.

Not that his 'meditating' rose
Beyond a sunny summer doze;
He never troubled his repose
With fruitless prying;
But held, as law for high and low,
What God withholds no man can know,
And smiled away inquiry so,
Without replying.

X.

We read—alas, how much we read!—
The jumbled strifes of creed and creed,
With endless controversies feed
Our groaning tables;
His books—and they sufficed him—were
Cotton's 'Montaigne,' 'The Grave' of Blair,
A 'Walton'—much the worse for wear,
And 'Æsop's Fables.'

XI.

One more,—'The Bible.' Not that he
Had searched its page as deep as we;
No sophistries could make him see
Its slender credit;
It may be that he could not count
The sires and sons to Jesse's fount,—
He liked the 'Sermon on the Mount,'—
And more, he read it.

XII.

Once he had loved, but failed to wed,
A red-cheeked lass who long was dead;
His ways were far too slow, he said,
To quite forget her;
And still when time had turned him gray,
The earliest hawthorn buds in May
Would find his lingering feet astray,
Where first he met her.

XIII.

'*In Cœlo Quies*' heads the stone
On Leisure's grave,—now little known,
A tangle of wild-rose has grown
So thick across it;
The 'Benefactions' still declare
He left the clerk an elbow-chair,
And '12 Pence Yearly to Prepare
A Christmas Posset.'

XIV.

Lie softly, Leisure! Doubtless you,
With too serene a conscience drew
Your easy breath, and slumbered through
The gravest issue;
But we, to whom our age allows
Scarce space to wipe our weary brows,
Look down upon your narrow house,
Old friend, and miss you!

A GENTLEWOMAN OF THE OLD SCHOOL.

I.

SHE lived in Georgian era too.
Most women then, if bards be true,
Succumbed to Routs and Cards, or grew
Devout and acid.
But hers was neither fate. She came
Of good west-country folk, whose fame
Has faded now. For us her name
Is 'Madam Placid.'

II.

Patience or Prudence,—what you will,
Some prefix faintly fragrant still
As those old musky scents that fill
Our grandams' pillows;
And for her youthful portrait take
Some long-waist child of Hudson's make,
Stiffly at ease beside a lake
With swans and willows.

III.

I keep her later semblance placed
Beside my desk,—'tis lawned and laced,
In shadowy sanguine stipple traced
By Bartolozzi;—
A placid face, in which surprise
Is seldom seen, but yet there lies
Some vestige of the laughing eyes
Of arch Piozzi.

IV.

For her e'en Time grew debonair.
He, finding cheeks unclaimed of care,
With late-delayed faint roses there,
                And lingering dimples,
Had spared to touch the fair old face,
And only kissed with Vauxhall grace
The soft white hand that stroked her lace,
                Or smoothed her wimples.

V.

So left her beautiful. Her age
Was comely as her youth was sage,
And yet she once had been the 'rage';—
                It hath been hinted,
Indeed, affirmed by one or two,
Some spark at Bath (as sparks will do)
Inscribed a song to 'Lovely Prue,'
                Which Urban printed.

VI.

I know she thought; I know she felt;
Perchance could sum, I doubt she spelt,
She knew as little of the Celt
As of the Saxon;
I know she played and sang, for yet
We keep the tumble-down spinet
To which she quavered ballads set
By Arne or Jackson.

VII.

Her tastes were not refined as ours,
She liked plain food and homely flowers,
Refused to paint, kept early hours,
Went clad demurely;
Her art was sampler-work design,
Fireworks for her were 'vastly fine,'
Her luxury was elder-wine,—
She loved that 'purely.'

VIII.

She was renowned, traditions say,
For June conserves, for curds and whey,
For finest tea (she called it 'tay'),
And ratafia;
She knew, for sprains, what bands to choose,
Could tell the sovereign wash to use
For freckles, and was learned in brews
As erst Medea.

IX.

Yet studied little. She would read,
On Sundays, 'Pearson on the Creed,'
Though, as I think, she could not heed
His text profoundly;
Seeing she chose for her retreat
The warm west-looking window-seat,
Where, if you chanced to raise your feet,
You slumbered soundly.

X.

This, 'twixt ourselves. The dear old dame,
In truth, was not so much to blame ;
The excellent divine I name
Is scarcely stirring ;
Her plain-song piety preferred
Pure life to precept. If she erred,
She knew her faults. Her softest word
Was for the erring.

XI.

If she had loved, or if she kept
Some ancient memory green, or wept
Over the shoulder-knot that slept
Within her cuff-box,
I know not. Only this I know,
At sixty-five she'd still her beau,
A lean French exile, lame and slow,
With monstrous snuff-box.

XII.

Younger than she, well-born and bred.
She 'd found him in St. Giles', half-dead
Of teaching French for nightly bed
And daily dinners;
Starving, in fact, 'twixt want and pride;
And so, henceforth, you always spied
His rusty 'pigeon-wings' beside
Her Mechlin pinners.

XIII.

He worshipped her, you may suppose.
She gained him pupils, gave him clothes,
Delighted in his dry bon-mots
And cackling laughter;
And when, at last, the long duet
Of conversation and picquet
Ceased with her death, of sheer regret
He died soon after.

XIV.

Dear Madam Placid! Others knew
Your worth as well as he, and threw
Their flowers upon your coffin too,
I take for granted.
Their loves are lost; but still we see
Your kind and gracious memory
Bloom yearly with the almond tree
The Frenchman planted.



UNE MARQUISE.

A RHYMED MONOLOGUE IN THE LOUVRE.

'*Belle Marquise, vos beaux yeux me font mourir d'amour.*'
MOLIÈRE.

I.

As you sit there at your ease,
O Marquise!
And the men flock round your knees
Thick as bees,
Mute at every word you utter,
Servants to your least frill flutter,
'*Belle Marquise!*'—

As you sit there growing prouder,
  And your ringed hands glance and go,
And your fan's *frou-frou* sounds louder,
  And your '*beaux yeux*' flash and glow ;—
Ah, you used them on the Painter,
          As you know,
For the Sieur Larose spoke fainter,
          Bowing low,
Thanked Madame and Heaven for mercy
That each sitter was not Circe,
  Or at least he told you so ;—
Growing proud, I say, and prouder
  To the crowd that come and go,
Dainty Deity of Powder,
  Fickle Queen of Fop and Beau,
As you sit where lustres strike you,
          Sure to please,
Do we love you most or like you,
          '*Belle Marquise!*'

II.

You are fair; O yes, we know it
Well, Marquise;
For he swore it, your last poet,
On his knees;
And he called all heaven to witness
Of his ballad and its fitness,
'*Belle Marquise!*'—
You were everything in *ère*
(With exception of *sévère*),—
You were *cruelle* and *rebelle*,
With the rest of rhymes as well;
You were '*Reine*,' and '*Mère d'Amour*;'
You were '*Vénus à Cythère*;'
'*Sappho mise en Pompadour*,'
And '*Minerve en Parabère*;'
You had every grace of heaven
In your most angelic face,

With the nameless finer leaven
  Lent of blood and courtly race ;
And he added, too, in duty,
Ninon's wit and Boufflers' beauty ;
And La Vallière's *yeux veloutés*
        Followed these ;
And you liked it, when he said it
        (On his knees),
And you kept it, and you read it,
        '*Belle Marquise!*'

III.

Yet with us your toilet graces
        Fail to please,
And the last of your last faces,
        And your *mise ;*
  For we hold you just as real,
        '*Belle Marquise!*'

As your *Bergers* and *Bergères*,
Iles d'Amour, and *Batelières*;
As your *parcs*, and your Versailles,
Gardens, grottoes, and *rocailles*;
As your Naiads and your trees;—
   Just as near the old ideal
                    Calm and ease,
As the Venus there, by Coustou,
   That a fan would make quite flighty,
Is to her the gods were used to,—
   Is to grand Greek Aphrodite,
                    Sprung from seas.
You are just a porcelain trifle,
                    '*Belle Marquise!*'
Just a thing of puffs and patches,
Made for madrigals and catches,
Not for heart-wounds, but for scratches,
                    O Marquise!

Just a pinky porcelain trifle,
'Belle Marquise!'
Wrought in rarest *rose-Dubarry*,
Quick at verbal point and parry,
Clever, doubtless;—but to marry,
No, Marquise!

IV.

For your Cupid, you have clipped him,
Rouged and patched him, nipped and snipped him,
And with *chapeau-bras* equipped him,
'Belle Marquise!'
Just to arm you through your wife-time,
And the languors of your life-time,
'Belle Marquise!'
Say, to trim your toilet tapers,
Or,—to twist your hair in papers,
Or,—to wean you from the vapours;—
As for these,

You are worth the love they give you,
Till a fairer face outlive you,
  Or a younger grace shall please;
Till the coming of the crows' feet,
And the backward turn of beaux' feet,
  '*Belle Marquise!*'—
Till your frothed-out life's commotion
Settles down to Ennui's ocean,
Or a dainty sham devotion,
  '*Belle Marquise!*'

V.

No: we neither like nor love you,
  '*Belle Marquise!*'
Lesser lights we place above you,—
  Milder merits better please.
We have passed from *Philosophe*-dom
  Into plainer modern days,—

Grown contented in our oafdom,
  Giving grace not all the praise ;
And, *en partant*, *Arsinoé*,—
  Without malice whatsoever,—
We shall counsel to our Chloë
  To be rather good than clever ;
For we find it hard to smother
  Just one little thought, Marquise !
Wittier perhaps than any other,—
You were neither Wife nor Mother,
'Belle Marquise!'

THE STORY OF ROSINA.

AN INCIDENT IN THE LIFE OF FRANÇOIS BOUCHER.

'*On ne badine pas avec l'amour.*'

THE scene, a wood. A shepherd tip-toe creeping,
  Carries a basket, whence a billet peeps,
To lay beside a silk-clad Oread sleeping
  Under an urn; yet not so sound she sleeps
But that she plainly sees his graceful act;
'He thinks she thinks he thinks she sleeps,' in fact.

One hardly needs the '*Peint par François Boucher.*'
  All the sham life comes back again,—one sees
Alcôves, *Ruelles*, the *Lever*, and the *Coucher*,
  Patches and Ruffles, *Roués* and *Marquises;*
The little great, the infinite small thing
That ruled the hour when Louis Quinze was king.

For these were yet the days of halcyon weather,—
  A Martin's summer when the nation swam,
Aimless and easy as a wayward feather,
  Down the full tide of jest and epigram;—
A careless time, when France's bluest blood
Beat to the tune of 'After us the flood.'

Plain Roland still was placidly 'inspecting,'
  Not now Camille had stirred the Café Foy;
Marat was young, and Guillotin dissecting,
  Corday unborn, and Lamballe in Savoie;
No *faubourg* yet had heard the Tocsin ring:—
This was the summer—when Grasshoppers sing.

And far afield were sun-baked savage creatures,
  Female and male, that tilled the earth, and wrung
Want from the soil ;—lean things with livid features,
  Shape of bent man, and voice that never sung :
These were the Ants, for yet to Jacques Bonhomme
Tumbrils were not, nor any sound of drum.

But Boucher was a Grasshopper, and painted,—
  Rose-water Raphael,—*en couleur de rose*,
The crowned Caprice, whose sceptre, nowise sainted,
  Swayed the light realm of ballets and bon-mots ;—
Ruled the dim boudoir's *demi-jour*, or drove
Pink-ribboned flocks through some pink-flowered grove.

A laughing Dame, who sailed a laughing cargo
  Of flippant loves along the *Fleuve du Tendre ;*
Whose greatest grace was *jupes à la Camargo*,
  Whose gentlest merit *gentiment se rendre ;*—
Queen of the rouge-cheeked Hours, whose footsteps fell
  To Rameau's notes, in dances by Gardel ;—

Her Boucher served, till Nature's self betraying,
  As Wordsworth sings, the heart that loved her not,
Made of his work a land of languid Maying,
  Filled with false gods and muses misbegot;—
A Versailles Eden of cosmetic youth,
Wherein most things went naked, save the Truth.

Once, only once,—perhaps the last night's revels
  Palled in the after-taste,—our Boucher sighed
For that first beauty, falsely named the Devil's,
  Young-lipped, unlessoned, joyous, and clear-eyed;
Flung down his palette like a weary man,
And sauntered slowly through the Rue Sainte-Anne.

Wherefore, we know not; but, at times, far nearer
  Things common come, and lineaments half-seen
Grow in a moment magically clearer;—
  Perhaps, as he walked, the grass he called 'too green'
Rose and rebuked him, or the earth 'ill-lighted'
Silently smote him with the charms he slighted.

But, as he walked, he tired of god and goddess,
Nymphs that deny, and shepherds that appeal;
Stale seemed the trick of kerchief and of bodice,
Folds that confess, and flutters that reveal;
Then as he grew more sad and disenchanted,
Forthwith he spied the very thing he wanted.

So, in the Louvre, the passer-by might spy some
Arch-looking head, with half-evasive air,
Start from behind the fruitage of Van Huysum,
Grape-bunch and melon, nectarine and pear:—
Here 'twas no Venus of Batavian city,
But a French girl, young, *piquante*, bright, and pretty.

Graceful she was, as some slim marsh-flower shaken
Among the sallows, in the breezy Spring;
Blithe as the first blithe song of birds that waken,
Fresh as a fresh young pear-tree blossoming;
Black was her hair as any blackbird's feather;
Just for her mouth, two rose-buds grew together.

Sloes were her eyes; but her soft cheeks were peaches,
  Hued like an Autumn pippin, where the red
Seems to have burned right through the skin, and reaches
  E'en to the core; and if you spoke, it spread
Up till the blush had vanquished all the brown,
And, like two birds, the sudden lids dropped down.

As Boucher smiled, the bright black eyes ceased dancing,
  As Boucher spoke, the dainty red eclipse
Filled all the face from cheek to brow, enhancing
  Half a shy smile that dawned around the lips.
Then a shrill mother rose upon the view;
'*Cerises, M'sieu? Rosine, dépêchez-vous!*'

Deep in the fruit her hands Rosina buries,
  Soon in the scale the ruby bunches lay.
The painter, watching the suspended cherries,
  Never had seen such little fingers play;—
As for the arm, no Hebe's could be rounder;
Low in his heart a whisper said 'I 've found her.'

'Woo first the mother, if you 'd win the daughter!'
  Boucher was charmed, and turned to *Madame Mère*,
Almost with tears of suppliance besought her
  Leave to immortalize a face so fair;
Praised and cajoled so craftily that straightway
Voici Rosina,—standing at his gateway.

Shy at the first, in time Rosina's laughter
  Rang through the studio as the girlish face
Peeped from some painter's travesty, or after
  Showed like an Omphale in lion's case;
Gay as a thrush, that from the morning dew
Pipes to the light its clear '*Réveillez-vous*.'

Just a mere child with sudden ebullitions,
  Flashes of fun, and little bursts of song,
Petulant pains, and fleeting pale contritions,
  Mute little moods of misery and wrong;
Only a child, of Nature's rarest making,
Wistful and sweet,—and with a heart for breaking!

Day after day the little loving creature
  Came and returned; and still the Painter felt,
Day after day, the old theatric Nature
  Fade from his sight, and like a shadow melt
Paniers and Powder, Pastoral and Scene,
Killed by the simple beauty of Rosine.

As for the girl, she turned to her new being,—
  Came, as a bird that hears its fellow call;
Blessed, as the blind that blesses God for seeing;
  Grew as a flower on which the sun-rays fall;
Loved if you will;—she never named it so:
Love comes unseen,—we only see it go.

There is a figure among Boucher's sketches,
  Slim,—a child-face, the eyes as black as beads,
Head set askance, and hand that shyly stretches
  Flowers to the passer, with a look that pleads.
This was no other than Rosina surely;—
None Boucher knew could else have looked so purely.

But forth her Story, for I will not tarry,—
  Whether he loved the little 'nut-brown maid;'
If, of a truth, he counted this to carry
  Straight to the end, or just the whim obeyed,
Nothing we know, but only that before
More had been done, a finger tapped the door.

Opened Rosina to the unknown comer.
  'Twas a young girl—'*une pauvre fille*,' she said,
'They had been growing poorer all the summer;
  Father was lame, and mother lately dead;
Bread was so dear, and,—oh! but want was bitter,
Would *Monsieur* pay to have her for a sitter?

Men called her pretty.' Boucher looked a minute:
  Yes, she was pretty; and her face beside
Shamed her poor clothing by a something in it,—
  Grace, and a presence hard to be denied;
This was no common offer it was certain;—
'*Allez*, Rosina! sit behind the curtain.'

Meantime the Painter, with a mixed emotion,
  Drew and re-drew his ill-disguised Marquise,
Passed in due time from praises to devotion;
  Last when his sitter left him on his knees,
Rose in a maze of passion and surprise,—
Rose, and beheld Rosina's saddened eyes.

Thrice-happy France, whose facile sons inherit
  Still in the old traditionary way,
Power to enjoy—with yet a rarer merit,
  Power to forget. Our Boucher rose, I say,
With hand still prest to heart, with pulses throbbing,
And blankly stared at poor Rosina sobbing.

'This was no model, *M'sieu*, but a lady.'
  Boucher was silent, for he knew it true.
'*Est-ce que vous l'aimez?*' Never answer made he!
  Ah, for the old love fighting with the new!
'*Est-ce que vous l'aimez?*' sobbed Rosina's sorrow.
'*Bon!*' murmured Boucher; 'she will come to-
    morrow.'

How like a Hunter thou, O Time, dost harry
   Us, thine oppressed, and pleasured with the chase
Sparest to strike thy sorely-running quarry,
   Following not less with unrelenting face.
Time, if Love hunt, and Sorrow hunt, with thee,
Woe to the Fawn! There is no way to flee.

Woe to Rosina! By To-morrow stricken,
   Swift from her life the sun of gold declined.
Nothing remained but those gray shades that thicken,
   Cloud and the cold,—the loneliness—the wind.
Only a little by the door she lingers,—
Waits, with wrung lip and interwoven fingers.

No, not a sign. Already with the Painter
   Grace and the nymphs began recovered reign;
Truth was no more, and Nature, waxing fainter,
   Paled to the old sick Artifice again.
Seeing Rosina going out to die,
How should he know what Fame had passed him by?

Going to die! For who shall waste in sadness,
  Shorn of the sun, the very warmth and light,
Miss the green welcome of the sweet earth's gladness,
  Lose the round life that only Love makes bright:
There is no succour if these things are taken.
None but Death loves the lips by Love forsaken.

So, in a little, when those Two had parted,—
  Tired of himself, and weary as before,
Boucher remembering, sick and sorry-hearted,
  Stayed for a moment by Rosina's door.
'Ah, the poor child!' the neighbours cry of her,
'*Morte, M'sieu, morte! On dit,—des peines du cœur.*'

Just for a second, say, the tidings shocked him,
  Say, in his eye a sudden tear-drop shone,—
Just for a second a dull feeling mocked him
  With a vague sense of something priceless gone;
Then,—for at best 'twas but the empty type,
The husk of man with which the days were ripe,—

Then, he forgot her. But, for you that slew her,
  You, her own sister, that with airy ease,
Just for a moment's fancy could undo her,
  Pass on your way. A little while, Marquise,
Be the sky silent, be the sea serene;
A pleasant passage—*à Sainte Guillotine.*

As for Rosina,—for the quiet sleeper,
  Whether stone hides her, or the happy grass,
If the sun quickens, if the dews beweep her,
  Laid in the Madeleine or Montparnasse,
Nothing we know,—but that her heart is cold,
Poor beating heart! And so the story 's told.

A REVOLUTIONARY RELIC.

I.

Old it is, and worn and battered,
As I lift it from the stall;
And the leaves are frayed and tattered,
And the pendent sides are shattered,
Pierced and blackened by a ball.

II.

'Tis the tale of grief and gladness
Told by sad St. Pierre of yore,
That in front of France's madness
Hangs a strange seductive sadness,
Grown pathetic evermore.

III.

And a perfume round it hovers,
  Which the pages half reveal,
For a folded corner covers,
Interlaced, two names of lovers,—
  A 'Savignac' and 'Lucile.'

IV.

As I read I marvel whether,
  In some pleasant old château,
Once they read this book together,
In the scented summer weather,
  With the shining Loire below?

V.

Nooked—secluded from espial,
  Did Love slip and snare them so,
While the hours danced round the dial
To the sound of flute and viol,
  In that pleasant old château?

VI.

Did it happen that no single
Word of mouth could either speak?
Did the brown and gold hair mingle,
Did the shamed skin thrill and tingle
To the shock of cheek and cheek?

VII.

Did they feel with that first flushing
Some new sudden power to feel,
Some new inner spring set gushing
At the names together rushing
Of 'Savignac' and 'Lucile'?

VIII.

Did he drop on knee before her—
'*Son Amour, son Cœur, sa Reine*'—
In his high-flown way, adore her,
Urgent, eloquent implore her,
Plead his pleasure and his pain?

D

IX.

Did she turn with sight swift-dimming,
 And the quivering lip we know,
With the full, slow eyelid brimming,
With the languorous pupil swimming,
 Like the love of Mirabeau?

X.

Stretch her hand from cloudy frilling,
 For his eager lips to press;
In a flash all fate fulfilling
Did he catch her, trembling, thrilling—
 Crushing life to one caress?

XI.

Did they sit in that dim sweetness
 Of attained love's after-calm,
Marking not the world—its meetness,
Marking Time not, nor his fleetness,
 Only happy, palm to palm?

XII.

Till at last she,—sunlight smiting
  Red on wrist and cheek and hair,—
Sought the page where love first lighting,
Fixed their fate, and, in this writing,
  Fixed the record of it there.

* * *

XIII.

Did they marry midst the smother,
  Shame and slaughter of it all?
Did she wander like that other
Woful, wistful, wife and mother,
  Round and round his prison wall;—

XIV.

Wander wailing, as the plover
  Waileth, wheeleth, desolate,
Heedless of the hawk above her,
While as yet the rushes cover,
  Waning fast, her wounded mate;—

XV.

Wander, till his love's eyes met hers,
  Fixed and wide in their despair?
Did he burst his prison fetters,
Did he write sweet, yearning letters,
  '*A Lucile,—en Angleterre*'?

XVI.

Letters where the reader, reading,
  Halts him with a sudden stop,
For he feels a man's heart bleeding,
Draining out its pain's exceeding—
  Half a life, at every drop:

XVII.

Letters where Love's iteration
  Seems to warble and to rave;
Letters where the pent sensation
Leaps to lyric exultation,
  Like a song-bird from a grave.

XVIII.

Where, through Passion's wild repeating
  Peep the Pagan and the Gaul,
Politics and love competing,
Abelard and Cato greeting,
  Rousseau ramping over all.

XIX.

Yet your critic's right—you waive it,
  Whirled along the fever-flood ;
And its touch of truth shall save it,
And its tender rain shall lave it,
For at least you read *Amavit*,
  Written there in tears of blood.

*   *   *

XX.

Did they hunt him to his hiding,
  Tracking traces in the snow?
Did they tempt him out, confiding,
Shoot him ruthless down, deriding,
  By the ruined old château?

XXI.

Left to lie, with thin lips resting
  Frozen to a smile of scorn,
Just the bitter thought's suggesting,
At this excellent new jesting
  Of the rabble Devil-born.

XXII.

Till some 'tiger-monkey,' finding
  These few words the covers bear,
Some swift rush of pity blinding,
Sent them in the shot-pierced binding
  '*A Lucile, en Angleterre.*'

*   *   *

XXIII.

Fancies only! Nought the covers,
  Nothing more the leaves reveal;
Yet I love it for its lovers,—
For the dream that round it hovers
  Of 'Savignac' and 'Lucile.'

BEFORE SEDAN.

'The dead hand clasped a letter.'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENCE.

HERE, in this leafy place,
    Quiet he lies,
Cold, with his sightless face
    Turned to the skies;
'Tis but another dead;
All you can say is said.

Carry his body hence,—
    Kings must have slaves;
Kings climb to eminence
    Over men's graves:
So this man's eye is dim;—
Throw the earth over him.

What was the white you touched,
    There, at his side?
Paper his hand had clutched
    Tight ere he died;—
Message or wish, may be;—
Smooth the folds out and see.

Hardly the worst of us
    Here could have smiled!—
Only the tremulous
    Words of a child;—
Prattle, that has for stops
Just a few ruddy drops.

Look. She is sad to miss,
Morning and night,
His—her dead father's—kiss;
Tries to be bright,
Good to mamma, and sweet.
That is all. 'Marguerite.'

Ah, if beside the dead
Slumbered the pain!
Ah, if the hearts that bled
Slept with the slain!
If the grief died;—But no;—
Death will not have it so.

AVICE.

'On serait tenté de lui dire, Bonjour, Mademoiselle la Bergeronnette.'—VICTOR HUGO.

I.

THOUGH the voice of modern schools
Has demurred,
By the dreamy Asian creed
'Tis averred,
That the souls of men, released
From their bodies when deceased,
Sometimes enter in a beast,—
Or a bird.

II.

I have watched you long, Avice,—
Watched you so,
I have found your secret out;
And I know
That the restless ribboned things,
Where your slope of shoulder springs,
Are but undeveloped wings
That will grow.

III.

When you enter in a room,
It is stirred
With the wayward, flashing flight
Of a bird;
And you speak—and bring with you
Leaf and sun-ray, bud and blue,
And the wind-breath and the dew
At a word.

IV.

When you called to me my name,
Then again
When I heard your single cry
In the lane,
All the sound was as the 'sweet'
Which the birds to birds repeat
In their thank-song to the heat
After rain.

V.

When you sang the *Schwalbenlied*,
'Twas absurd,—
But it seemed no human note
That I heard;
For your strain had all the trills,
All the little shakes and stills,
Of the over-song that rills
From a bird.

VI.

You have just their eager, quick
'*Airs de tête*,'
All their flush and fever-heat
When elate;
Every bird-like nod and beck,
And a bird's own curve of neck
When she gives a little peck
To her mate.

VII.

When you left me, only now,
In that furred,
Puffed, and feathered Polish dress,
I was spurred
Just to catch you, O my Sweet,
By the bodice trim and neat,—
Just to feel your heart a-beat,
Like a bird.

VIII.

Yet, alas! Love's light you deign
But to wear
As the dew upon your plumes,
And you care
Not a whit for rest or hush;
But the leaves, the lyric gush,
And the wing-power, and the rush
Of the air.

IX.

So I dare not woo you, Sweet,
For a day,
Lest I lose you in a flash,
As I may;
Did I tell you tender things,
You would shake your sudden wings;—
You would start from him who sings,
And away.

A DIALOGUE FROM PLATO.

'*Le temps le mieux employé est celui qu'on perd.*'
CLAUDE TILLIER.

I 'D 'read' three hours. Both notes and text
Were fast a mist becoming;
In bounced a vagrant bee, perplexed,
And filled the room with humming,

Then out. The casement's leafage sways,
And, parted light, discloses
Miss Di., with hat and book,—a maze
Of muslin mixed with roses.

'You 're reading Greek?' 'I am—and you?'
'O, mine 's a mere romancer!'
'So Plato is.' 'Then read him—do;
And I 'll read mine in answer.'

I read. 'My Plato (Plato, too,—
That wisdom thus should harden!)
Declares "blue eyes look doubly blue
Beneath a Dolly Varden."'

She smiled. 'My book in turn avers
(No author's name is stated)
That sometimes those Philosophers
Are sadly mis-translated.'

'But hear,—the next 's in stronger style
The Cynic School asserted
That two red lips which part and smile
May not be controverted!'

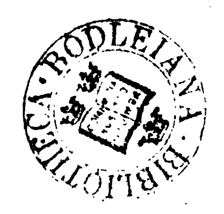
She smiled once more—'My book, I find,
  Observes some modern doctors
Would make the Cynics out a kind
  Of album-verse concoctors.'

Then I—'Why not? "Ephesian law,
  No less than time's tradition,
Enjoined fair speech on all who saw
  DIANA's apparition."'

She blushed—this time. 'If Plato's page
  No wiser precept teaches,
Then I'd renounce that doubtful sage,
  And walk to Burnham-beeches.'

'Agreed,' I said. 'For Socrates
  (I find he too is talking)
Thinks Learning can't remain at ease
  While Beauty goes a-walking.'

She read no more. I leapt the sill:
The sequel 's scarce essential—
Nay, more than this, I hold it still
Profoundly confidential.



AN AUTUMN IDYLL.

'*Sweet Themmes! runne softly, till I end my song.*'—SPENSER.

LAWRENCE. FRANK. JACK.

LAWRENCE.

HERE, where the beech-nuts drop among the grasses,
  Push the boat in, and throw the rope ashore.
Jack, hand me out the claret and the glasses;
  Here let us sit. We landed here before.

FRANK.

Jack's undecided. Say, *formose puer*,
  Bent in a dream above the 'water wan,'
Shall we row higher, for the reeds are fewer,
  There by the pollards, where you see the swan?

JACK.

Hist! That's a pike. Look—nose against the river,
  Gaunt as a wolf,—the sly old privateer!
Enter a gudgeon. Snap,—a gulp, a shiver;—
  Exit the gudgeon. Let us anchor here.

FRANK (*in the grass*).

Jove, what a day! Black Care upon the crupper
  Nods at his post, and slumbers in the sun;
Half of Theocritus, with a touch of Tupper,
  Churns in my head. The frenzy has begun!

LAWRENCE.

Sing to us then. Damœtas in a choker,
  Much out of tune, will edify the rooks.

FRANK.

Sing you again. So musical a croaker
  Surely will draw the fish upon the hooks.

JACK.

Sing while you may. The beard of manhood still is
Faint on your cheeks, but I, alas! am old.
Doubtless you yet believe in Amaryllis;—
Sing me of Her, whose name may not be told.

FRANK.

Listen, O Thames! His budding beard is riper,
Say—by a week. Well, Lawrence, shall we sing?

LAWRENCE.

Yes, if you will. But ere I play the piper,
Let him declare the prize he has to bring.

JACK.

Hear then, my Shepherds. Lo, to him accounted
First in the song, a Pipe I will impart;—
This, my Belovèd, marvellously mounted,
Amber and foam,—a miracle of art.

LAWRENCE.

Lordly the gift. O Muse of many numbers
  Grant me a soft alliterative song!

FRANK.

Me too, O Muse! And when the Umpire slumbers,
  Sting him with gnats a summer evening long.

LAWRENCE.

Not in a cot, begarlanded of spiders,
  Not where the brook traditionally purls,—
No, in the Row, supreme among the riders,
  Seek I the gem,—the paragon of girls.

FRANK.

Not in the waste of column and of coping,
  Not in the sham and stucco of a square,—
No, on a June-lawn, to the water sloping,
  Stands she I honour, beautifully fair.

LAWRENCE.

Dark-haired is mine, with splendid tresses plaited
  Back from the brows, imperially curled;
Calm as a grand, far-looking Caryatid,
  Holding the roof that covers in a world.

FRANK.

Dark-haired is mine, with breezy ripples swinging
  Loose as a vine-branch blowing in the morn;
Eyes like the morning, mouth for ever singing,
  Blithe as a bird, new risen from the corn.

LAWRENCE.

Best is the song with music interwoven:
  Mine's a musician,—musical at heart,—
Throbs to the gathered grieving of Beethoven,
  Sways to the light coquetting of Mozart.

FRANK.

Best? You should hear mine trilling out a ballad,
Queen at a pic-nic, leader of the glees,
Not too divine to toss you up a salad,
Great in Sir Roger danced among the trees.

LAWRENCE.

Ah, when the thick night flares with dropping torches,
Ah, when the crush-room empties of the swarm,
Pleasant the hand that, in the gusty porches,
Light as a snow-flake, settles on your arm.

FRANK.

Better the twilight and the cheery chatting,—
Better the dim, forgotten garden-seat,
Where one may lie, and watch the fingers tatting,
Lounging with Bran or Bevis at her feet.

LAWRENCE.

All worship mine. Her purity doth hedge her
Round with so delicate divinity, that men,
Stained to the soul with money-bag and ledger,
Bend to the goddess, manifest again.

FRANK.

None worship mine. But some, I fancy, love her,—
Cynics to boot. I know the children run,
Seeing her come, for naught that I discover,
Save that she brings the summer and the sun.

LAWRENCE.

Mine is a Lady, beautiful and queenly,
Crowned with a sweet, continual control,
Grandly forbearing, lifting life serenely
E'en to her own nobility of soul.

FRANK.

Mine is a Woman, kindly beyond measure,
  Fearless in praising, faltering in blame;
Simply devoted to other people's pleasure,—
  Jack's sister Florence,—now you know her name.

LAWRENCE.

'Jack's sister Florence!' Never, Francis, never.
  Jack, do you hear? Why, it was she I meant.
She like the country! Ah, she's far too clever—

FRANK.

  There you are wrong. I know her down in Kent.

LAWRENCE.

You'll get a sunstroke, standing with your head bare.
  Sorry to differ. Jack,—the word's with you.

FRANK.

How is it, Umpire? Though the motto 's threadbare,
'*Cælum, non animum*'—is, I take it, true.

JACK.

'*Souvent femme varie,*' as a rule, is truer;
Flattered, I 'm sure,—but both of you romance.
Happy to further suit of either wooer,
Merely observing—you haven't got a chance.

LAWRENCE.

Yes. But the Pipe—

FRANK.

The Pipe is what we care for,—

JACK.

Well, in this case, I scarcely need explain,
Judgment of mine were indiscreet, and therefore,—
Peace to you both. The Pipe I shall retain.

A GARDEN IDYLL.

A LADY. A POET.

THE LADY.

I.

SIR POET, ere you crossed the lawn
  (If it was wrong to watch you, pardon),
Behind this weeping birch withdrawn,
  I watched you saunter round the garden.
I saw you bend beside the phlox,
  Pluck, as you passed, a sprig of myrtle,
Review my well-ranged hollyhocks,
  Smile at the fountain's slender spurtle;

II.

You paused beneath the cherry-tree,
  Where my marauder thrush was singing,
Peered at the bee-hives curiously,
  And narrowly escaped a stinging;
And then—you see I watched—you passed
  Down the espalier walk that reaches
Out to the western wall, and last
  Dropped on the seat before the peaches.

III.

What was your thought? You waited long.
  Sublime or graceful,—grave,—satiric?
A Morris Greek-and-Gothic song?
  A tender Ténnysonian lyric?
Tell me. That garden-seat shall be,
  So long as speech renown disperses,
Illustrious as the spot where he—
  The gifted Blank—composed his verses.

THE POET.

IV.

Madam,—whose uncensorious eye
  Grows gracious over certain pages,
Wherein the Jester's maxims lie,
  It may be, thicker than the Sage's—
I hear but to obey, and could
  Mere wish of mine the pleasure do you,
Some verse as whimsical as Hood,—
  As gay as Praed,—should answer to you.

V.

But, though the common voice proclaims
  Our only serious vocation
Confined to giving nothings names,
  And dreams a 'local habitation;'
Believe me, there are tuneless days,
  When neither marble, brass, nor vellum,
Would profit much by any lays
  That haunt the poet's cerebellum.

VI.

More empty things, I fear, than rhymes,
  More idle things than songs, absorb it;
The 'finely-frenzied' eye, at times,
  Reposes mildly in its orbit;
And, painful truth, at times, to him,
  Whose jog-trot thought is nowise restive,
'A primrose by a river's brim'
  Is absolutely unsuggestive.

VII.

The fickle Muse! As ladies will,
  She sometimes wearies of her wooer;
A goddess, yet a woman still,
  She flies the more that we pursue her;
In short, with worst as well as best,
  Five months in six, your hapless poet
Is just as prosy as the rest,
  But cannot comfortably show it.

VIII.

You thought, no doubt, the garden-scent
  Brings back some brief-winged bright sensation
Of love that came and love that went,—
  Some fragrance of a lost flirtation,
Born when the cuckoo changes song,
  Dead ere the apple's red is on it,
That should have been an epic long,
  Yet scarcely served to fill a sonnet.

IX.

Or else you thought,—the murmuring noon,
  He turns it to a lyric sweeter,
With birds that gossip in the tune,
  And windy bough-swing in the metre;
Or else the zigzag fruit-tree arms
  Recall some dream of harp-prest bosoms,
Round singing mouths, and chanted charms,
  And mediæval orchard blossoms,—

X.

Quite *à la mode.* Alas for prose,—
My vagrant fancies only rambled
Back to the red-walled Rectory close,
Where first my graceless boyhood gamboled,
Climbed on the dial, teased the fish,
And chased the kitten round the beeches,
Till widening instincts made me wish
For certain slowly-ripening peaches.

XI.

Three peaches. Not the Graces three
Had more equality of beauty:
I would not look, yet went to see;
I wrestled with Desire and Duty;
I felt the pangs of those who feel
The Laws of Property beset them;
The conflict made my reason reel,
And, half-abstractedly, I ate them;—

XII.

Or Two of them. Forthwith Despair—
  More keen that one of these was rotten—
Moved me to seek some forest lair
  Where I might hide and dwell forgotten,
Attired in skins, by berries stained,
  Absolved from brushes and ablution;—
But, ere my sylvan haunt was gained,
  Fate gave me up to execution.

XIII.

I saw it all but now. The grin
  That gnarled old Gardener Sandy's features;
My father, scholar-like and thin,
  Unroused, the tenderest of creatures;
I saw—ah me—I saw again
  My dear and deprecating mother;
And then, remembering the cane,
  Regretted—that I 'd left the other.

TU QUOQUE.

AN IDYLL IN THE CONSERVATORY.

'—romprons-nous,
Ou ne romprons-nous pas?'
LE DÉPIT AMOUREUX.

NELLIE.

IF I were you, when ladies at the play, sir,
Beckon and nod, a melodrama through,
I would not turn abstractedly away, sir,
If I were you!

FRANK.

If I were you, when persons I affected,
Wait for three hours to take me down to Kew,
I would, at least, pretend I recollected,
If I were you!

NELLIE.

If I were you, when ladies are so lavish,
  Sir, as to keep me every waltz but two,
I would not dance with *odious* Miss M'Tavish,
  If I were you!

FRANK.

If I were you, who vow you cannot suffer
  Whiff of the best,—the mildest 'honey-dew,'
I would not dance with smoke-consuming Puffer,
  If I were you!

NELLIE.

If I were you, I would not, sir, be bitter,
  Even to write the 'Cynical Review;'—

FRANK.

No, I should doubtless find flirtation fitter,
  If I were you!

NELLIE.

Really! You would? Why, Frank, you 're quite
delightful,—
Hot as Othello, and as black of hue;
Borrow my fan. I would not look so *frightful*,
If I were you!

FRANK.

'It is the cause.' I mean your chaperon is
Bringing some well-curled juvenile. Adieu!
I shall retire. I 'd spare that poor Adonis,
If I were you!

NELLIE.

Go, if you will. At once! And by express, sir!
Where shall it be? To China—or Peru?
Go. I should leave inquirers my address, sir,
If I were you!

FRANK.

No,—I remain. To stay and fight a duel
Seems, on the whole, the proper thing to do—
Ah, you are strong,—I would not then be cruel,
If I were you!

NELLIE.

One does not like one's feelings to be doubted,—

FRANK.

One does not like one's friends to misconstrue,—

NELLIE.

If I confess that I a wee-bit pouted?—

FRANK.

I should admit that I was *piqué*, too.

NELLIE.

Ask me to dance. I'd say no more about it,
If I were you!

[Waltz—*Exeunt.*]

'LE ROMAN DE LA ROSE.'

Poor Rose! I lift you from the street—
  Far better I should own you
Than you should lie for random feet
  Where careless hands have thrown you.

Poor pinky petals, crushed and torn!
  Did heartless Mayfair use you,
Then cast you forth to lie forlorn,
  For chariot-wheels to bruise you?

I saw you last in Edith’s hair.
  Rose, you would scarce discover
That I she passed upon the stair
  Was Edith’s favoured lover,

A month—‘a little month’—ago—
  O theme for moral writer!—
’Twixt you and me, my Rose, you know,
  She might have been politer;

But let that pass. She gave you then—
  Behind the oleander—
To one, perhaps, of all the men,
  Who best could understand her,—

Cyril, that, duly flattered, took,
  As only Cyril’s able,
With just the same Arcadian look
  He used, last night, for Mabel;

Then, having waltzed till every star
  Had paled away in morning,
Lit up his cynical cigar,
  And tossed you downward, scorning.

Kismet, my Rose ! Revenge is sweet,—
  She made my heart-strings quiver ;
And yet—You shan't lie in the street,
  I 'll drop you in the River.

AD ROSAM.

'Mitte sectari ROSA *quo locorum*
Sera moretur.'
HOR. I. 38.

I.

I HAD a vacant dwelling—
Where situated, I,
As nought can serve the telling,
Decline to specify;—
Enough 'twas neither haunted,
Entailed, nor out of date;
I put up 'Tenant Wanted,'
And left the rest to Fate.

II.

Then, Rose, you passed the window,—
  I see you passing yet,—
Ah, what could I within do,
  When, Rose, our glances met!
You snared me, Rose, with ribbons,
  Your rose-mouth made me thrall,
Brief—briefer far than Gibbon's,
  Was my 'Decline and Fall.'

III.

I heard the summons spoken
  That all hear—king and clown:
You smiled—the ice was broken;
  You stopped—the bill was down.
How blind we are! It never
  Occurred to me to seek
If you had come for ever,
  Or only for a week.

IV.

The words your voice neglected,
  Seemed written in your eyes;
The thought your heart protected,
  Your cheek told, missal-wise;—
I read the rubric plainly
  As any Expert could;
In short, we dreamed,—insanely,
  As only lovers should.

V.

I broke the tall Œnone,
  That then my chambers graced,
Because she seemed 'too bony,'
  To suit your purist taste;
And you, without vexation,
  May certainly confess
Some graceful approbation,
  Designed *à mon adresse.*

VI.

You liked me then, *carina*,—
You liked me then, I think;
For your sake gall had been a
Mere tonic-cup to drink;
For your sake, bonds were trivial,
The rack, a *tour-de-force;*
And banishment, convivial,—
You coming too, of course.

VII.

Then, Rose, a word in jest meant
Would throw you in a state
That no well-timed investment
Could quite alleviate;
Beyond a Paris trousseau
You prized my smile, I know,
I, yours—ah, more than Rousseau
The lip of d'Houdetot.

VIII.

Then, Rose,—But why pursue it?
  When Fate begins to frown
Best write the final '*fuit*,'
  And gulp the physic down.
And yet,—and yet, that only,
  The song should end with this:—
You left me,—left me lonely,
  Rosa mutabilis!

IX.

Left me, with Time for Mentor,
  (A dreary *tête-à-tête!*)
To pen my 'Last Lament,' or
  Extemporize to Fate,
In blankest verse disclosing
  My bitterness of mind,—
Which is, I learn, composing
  In cases of the kind.

X.

No, Rose. Though you refuse me,
 Culture the pang prevents;
'I am not made'—excuse me—
 'Of so slight elements;'
I leave to common lovers
 The hemlock or the hood;
My rarer soul recovers
 In dreams of public good.

XI.

The Roses of this nation—
 Or so I understand
From careful computation—
 Exceed the gross demand;
And, therefore, in civility
 To maids that can't be matched,
No man of sensibility
 Should linger unattached.

XII.

So, without further fashion—
  A modern Curtius,
Plunging, from pure compassion,
  To aid the overplus,—
I sit down, sad—not daunted,
  And, in my weeds, begin
A new card—'Tenant Wanted;
  Particulars Within.'



THE LOVE-LETTER.

'J'ai vu les mœurs de mon tems, et j'ai publié cette lettre.'
LA NOUVELLE HÉLOISE.

IF this should fail, why then I scarcely know
What could succeed. Here's brilliancy (and banter),
Byron *ad lib.*, a chapter of Rousseau;—
If this should fail, then *tempora mutantur;*
Style's out of date, and love, as a profession,
Acquires no aid from beauty of expression.

'The men who think as I, I fear, are few,'
(Cynics would say 'twere well if they were fewer);

'I am not what I seem,'—(indeed, 'tis true
  Though, as a sentiment, it might be newer);
'Mine is a soul whose deeper feelings lie
More deep than words'—(as these exemplify).

'I will not say when first your beauty's sun
  Illumed my life,'—(it needs imagination);
'For me to see you and to love were one,'—
  (This will account for some precipitation);
'Let it suffice that worship more devoted
Ne'er throbbed,' *et cætera.* The rest is quoted.

'If Love can look with all-prophetic eye,'—
  (Ah, if he could, how many would be single!),
'If truly spirit unto spirit cry,'—
  (The ears of some most terribly must tingle!)
'Then I have dreamed you will not turn your face.'
This next, I think, is more than commonplace.

'Why should we speak, if Love, interpreting,
  Forestall the speech with favour found before?
Why should we plead?—it were an idle thing,
  If Love himself be Love's ambassador!'
Blot, as I live. Shall we erase it? No;—
'Twill show we write *currente calamo.*

'My fate,—my fortune, I commit to you,—
  (In point of fact, the latter 's not extensive);
'Without you I am poor indeed,'—(strike through,
  'Tis true but crude—'twould make her apprehensive);
My life is yours—I lay it at your feet,'
(Having no choice but Hymen or the Fleet).

'Give me the right to stand within the shrine,
  Where never yet my faltering feet intruded;
Give me the right to call you wholly mine,'—
  (That is, Consols and Three per Cents included);

'To guard your rest from every care that cankers,—
To keep your life,'—(and balance at your banker's).

'Compel me not to long for your reply;
  Suspense makes havoc with the mind'—(and muscles);
'Winged Hope takes flight,'—(which means that I must fly,
  Default of funds, to Paris or to Brussels);
'I cannot wait! My own, my queen—Priscilla!
Write by return.' And *now* for a Manila!

'Miss Blank,' at 'Blank.' Jemima, let it go,
  And I, meanwhile, will idle with 'Sir Walter;'
Stay, let me keep the first rough copy, though—
  'Twill serve again. There's but the name to alter,
And Love, that needs, must knock at every portal,
In formâ pauperis. We are but mortal!

A VIRTUOSO.

I.

BE seated, pray. 'A grave appeal'?
  The sufferers by the war, of course;
Ah, what a sight for us who feel,—
  This monstrous *mélodrame* of Force!
We, Sir, we connoisseurs, should know,
  On whom its heaviest burden falls;
Collections shattered at a blow,
  Museums turned to hospitals!

II.

'And worse,' you say; 'the wide distress!'
  Alas, 'tis true distress exists,
Though, let me add, our worthy Press
  Have no mean skill as colourists;—
Speaking of colour, next your seat
  There hangs a sketch from Vernet's hand;
Some Moscow fancy, incomplete,
  Yet not indifferently planned;

III.

Note specially the gray old Guard,
  Who tears his tattered coat to wrap
A closer bandage round the scarred
  And frozen comrade in his lap;—
But, as regards the present war,—
  Now don't you think our pride of pence
Goes—may I say it?—somewhat far
  For objects of benevolence?

IV.

You hesitate. For my part, I—
  Though ranking Paris next to Rome,
Æsthetically—still reply
  That 'Charity begins at Home.'
The words remind me. Did you catch
  My so-named 'Hunt'? The girl's a gem;
And look how those lean rascals snatch
  The pile of scraps she brings to them!

V.

'But your appeal's for home,' you say,
  'For home, and English poor!' Indeed!
I thought Philanthropy to-day
  Was blind to mere domestic need—
However sore—Yet though one grants
  That home should have the foremost claims,
At least these Continental wants
  Assume intelligible names;

VI.

While here with us—Ah ! who could hope
  To verify the varied pleas,
Or from his private means to cope
  With all our shrill necessities !
Impossible ! One might as well
  Attempt comparison of creeds ;
Or fill that huge Malayan shell
  With these half-dozen Indian beads.

VII.

Moreover, add that every one
  So well exalts his pet distress,
'Tis—Give to all, or give to none,
  If you 'd avoid invidiousness.
Your case, I feel, is sad as A.'s,
  The same applies to B.'s and C.'s ;
By my selection I should raise
  An alphabet of rivalries ;

VIII.

And life is short,—I see you look
  At yonder dish, a priceless bit
You 'll find it etched in Jacquemart's book,
  They say that Raphael painted it ;—
And life is short, you understand ;
  So, if I only hold you out
An open though an empty hand,
  Why, you 'll forgive me, I 've no doubt.

IX.

Nay, do not rise. You seem amused ;
  One can but be consistent, Sir !
'Twas on these grounds I just refused
  Some gushing lady-almoner,—
Believe me, on these very grounds.
  Good-bye, then. Ah, a rarity !
That cost me quite three hundred pounds,—
  That Dürer figure,—'Charity.'

LAISSEZ FAIRE.

'*Prophete rechts, Prophete links,*
Das Weltkind in der Mitten.'
GOETHE'S *Diné zu Coblenz.*

To left, here 's B., half-Communist,
Who talks a chastened treason,
And C., a something-else in 'ist,'
Harangues, to right, on Reason.

B., from his 'tribune,' fulminates
At Throne and Constitution,
Nay, with the walnuts, advocates
Reform by revolution ;

While C.'s peculiar coterie
  Have now in full rehearsal
Some patent new Philosophy
  To make doubt universal.

And yet—why not? If zealots burn,
  Their zeal has not affected
My taste for salmon and Sauterne,
  Or I might have objected :—

Friend B., the argument you choose
  Has been by France refuted ;
And C., *mon cher*, your novel views
  Are just Tom Paine, diluted ;

There 's but one creed,—that 's *Laissez faire ;*
  Behold its mild apostle !
My dear, declamatory pair,
  Although you shout and jostle,

Not your ephemeral hands, nor mine,
  Time's Gordian knots shall sunder,—
Will. laid three casks of this old wine:
  Who'll drink the last, I wonder?

A LEGACY.

AH, Postumus, we all must go:
  This keen North-Easter nips my shoulder;
My strength begins to fail; I know
  You find me older;

I've made my Will. Dear, faithful friend—
  My Muse's friend and not my purse's!
Who still would hear and still commend
  My tedious verses,

How will you live—of these deprived?
  I 've learned your candid soul. The venal,—
The sordid friend had scarce survived
  A test so penal;

But you—Nay, nay, 'tis so. The rest
  Are not as you : you hide your merit;
You, more than all, deserve the best
  True friends inherit;—

Not gold—that hearts like yours despise;
  Not 'spacious dirt' (your own expression),
No; but the rarer, dearer prize—
  The life's confession!

You catch my thought? What? Can't you guess?
  You, you alone, admired my Cantos;—
I 've left you, P., my whole MS.,
  In three portmanteaus!

TO Q. H. F.

SUGGESTED BY A CHAPTER IN THEODORE MARTIN'S 'HORACE,'

('ANCIENT CLASSICS FOR ENGLISH READERS.')

I.

'Horatius Flaccus, B.C. 8,'
There 's not a doubt about the date,—
You 're dead and buried:
As you remarked, the seasons roll;
And 'cross the Styx full many a soul
Has Charon ferried,
Since, mourned of men and Muses nine,
They laid you on the Esquiline.

II.

And that was centuries ago!
You 'd think we 'd learned enough, I know,
To help refine us,
Since last you trod the Sacred Street,
And tacked from mortal fear to meet
The bore Crispinus;
Or, by your cold Digentia, set
The web of winter birding-net.

III.

Ours is so far-advanced an age!
Sensation tales, a classic stage,
Commodious villas!
We boast high art, an Albert Hall,
Australian meats, and men who call
Their sires gorillas!
We have a thousand things, you see,
Not dreamt in your philosophy.

IV.

And yet, how strange! Our 'world,' to-day,
Tried in the scale, would scarce outweigh
Your Roman cronies;
Walk in the Park—you 'll seldom fail
To find a Sybaris on the rail
By Lydia's ponies,
Or hap on Barrus, wigged and stayed,
Ogling some unsuspecting maid.

V.

The great Gargilius, then, behold!
His 'long-bow' hunting tales of old
Are now but duller;
Fair Neobule too! Is not
One Hebrus here—from Aldershot?
Aha, you colour!
Be wise. There old Canidia sits;
No doubt she 's tearing you to bits

VI.

And look, dyspeptic, brave, and kind,
Comes dear Mæcenas, half behind
Terentia's skirting;
Here 's Pyrrha, 'golden-haired' at will;
Prig Damasippus, preaching still;
Asterie flirting,—
Radiant, of course. We 'll make her black,—
Ask her when Gyges' ship comes back.

VII.

So with the rest. Who will may trace
Behind the new each elder face
Defined as clearly;
Science proceeds, and man stands still;
Our 'world' to-day 's as good or ill,—
As cultured (nearly),
As yours was, Horace! You alone,
Unmatched, unmet, we have not known.

A GAGE D'AMOUR.

(HORACE, III. 8.)

'*Martiis cælebs quid agam Kalendis,*
——*miraris?*'

I.

CHARLES,—for it seems you wish to know,—
You wonder what could scare me so,
And why, in this long-locked bureau,
With trembling fingers,—
With tragic air, I now replace
This ancient web of yellow lace,
Among whose faded folds the trace
Of perfume lingers.

II.

Friend of my youth, severe as true,
I guess the train your thoughts pursue ;
But this my state is nowise due
To indigestion ;
I had forgotten it was there,
A scarf that Some-one used to wear.
Hinc illæ lacrimæ,—so spare
Your cynic question.

III.

Some-one who is not girlish now,
And wed long since. We meet and bow ;
I don't suppose our broken vow
Affects us keenly ;
Yet, trifling though my act appears,
Your Sternes would make it ground for tears ;—
One can't disturb the dust of years,
And smile serenely.

IV.

'My golden locks' are gray and chill,
For hers,—let them be sacred still ;.
But yet, I own, a boyish thrill
Went dancing through me,
Charles, when I held yon yellow lace ;
For, from its dusty hiding-place,
Peeped out an arch, ingenuous face
That beckoned to me.

V.

We shut our heart up, now-a-days,
Like some old music-box that plays
Unfashionable airs that raise
Derisive pity ;
Alas,—a nothing starts the spring ;
And lo, the sentimental thing
At once commences quavering
Its lover's ditty.

VI.

Laugh, if you like. The boy in me,—
The boy that was,—revived to see
The fresh young smile that shone when she,
Of old, was tender.
Once more we trod the Golden Way,—
That mother you saw yesterday,
And I, whom none can well portray
As young, or slender.

VII.

She twirled the flimsy scarf about
Her pretty head, and stepping out,
Slipped arm in mine, with half a pout
Of childish pleasure.
Where we were bound no mortal knows,
For then you plunged in Ireland's woes,
And brought me blankly back to prose
And Gladstone's measure.

VIII.

Well, well, the wisest bend to Fate.
My brown old books around me wait,
My pipe still holds, unconfiscate,
Its wonted station.
Pass me the wine. To Those that keep
The bachelor's secluded sleep
Peaceful, inviolate, and deep,
I pour libation.

OUTWARD BOUND.

(HORACE, III. 7.)

'Quid fles, Asterie, quem tibi candidi
Primo restituent vere Favonii—
Gygen?'

I.

COME, Laura, patience. Time and spring
Your absent Arthur back shall bring,
Enriched with many an Indian thing,
Once more to woo you;
Him, neither wind nor wave can check
Who, cramped beneath the 'Simla's' deck,
Still constant, though with stiffened neck,
Makes verses to you.

II.

Would it were wave and wind alone!
The terrors of the torrid zone,
The indiscriminate cyclone,
A man might parry;
But only faith, or 'triple brass,'
Can help the 'outward-bound' to pass
Safe through that eastward-faring class
Who sail to marry.

III.

For him fond mothers, stout and fair,
Ascend the tortuous cabin stair
Only to hold around his chair
Insidious sessions;
For him the eyes of daughters droop
Across the plate of handed soup,
Suggesting seats upon the poop,
And soft confessions.

IV.

Nor are these all his pains, nor most.
Romancing captains cease to boast—
Loud majors leave their whist—to roast
The youthful griffin ;
All, all with pleased persistence show
His fate,—'remote, unfriended, slow,'—
His 'melancholy' bungalow,—
His lonely tiffin.

V.

In vain. Let doubts assail the weak ;
Unmoved and calm as 'Adam's Peak,'
Your 'blameless Arthur' hears them speak
Of woes that wait him ;
Nought can subdue his soul secure ;
'Arthur will come again,' be sure,
Though matron shrewd and maid mature
Conspire to mate him.

VI.

But, Laura, on your side, forbear
To greet with too impressed an air
A certain youth with chesnut hair,—
A youth unstable;
Albeit none more skilled can guide
The frail canoe on Thamis tide,
Or, trimmer-footed, lighter glide
Through 'Guards'' or 'Mabel.'

VII.

Be warned in time. Without a trace
Of acquiescence on your face,
Hear, in the waltz's breathing-space,
His airy patter;
Avoid the confidential nook;
If, when you sing, you find his look
Grow tender, close your music-book,
And end the matter.

TO 'LYDIA LANGUISH.'

'*Il me faut des émotions.*'
BLANCHE AMORY.

I.

YOU ask me, Lydia, 'whether I,
If you refuse my suit, shall die.'
(Now pray don't let this hurt you);
Although the time be out of joint,
I should not think a bodkin's point
The sole resource of virtue;
Nor shall I, though your mood endure,
Attempt a final Water-cure
Except against my wishes;

For I respectfully decline
To dignify the Serpentine,
  And make *hors-d'œuvres* for fishes :
But, if you ask me whether I
  Composedly can go,
Without a look, without a sigh,
  Why, then I answer—No.

II.

'You are assured,' you sadly say
(If in this most considerate way
  To treat my suit your will is),
That I shall 'quickly find as fair
Some new Neæra's tangled hair—
  Some easier Amaryllis.'
I cannot promise to be cold
If smiles are kind as yours of old
  On lips of later beauties ;

Nor can I hope to quite forget
The homage that is Nature's debt,
  While man has social duties;
But, if you ask shall I prefer
  To you I honour so
A somewhat visionary Her,
  I answer truly—No.

III.

You fear, you frankly add, 'to find
In me too late the altered mind
  That altering Time estranges.'
To this I make response that we
(As physiologists agree),
  Must have septennial changes;
This is a thing beyond control,
And it were best upon the whole
  To try and find out whether

We could not, by some means, arrange
This not-to-be-avoided change
  So as to change together:
But, had you asked me to allow
  That you could ever grow
Less amiable than you are now,—
  Emphatically—No.

IV.

But—to be serious—if you care
To know how I shall really bear
  This much-discussed rejection,
I answer you. As feeling men
Behave, in best romances, when
  You outrage their affection;—
With that gesticulatory woe,
By which, as melodramas show,
  Despair is indicated;

Enforced by all the liquid grief
Which hugest pocket-handkerchief
  Has ever simulated;
And when, arrived so far, you say
  In tragic accents 'Go,'
Then, Lydia, then—I still shall stay,
  And firmly answer No.

A SHORT VACATION.

'Humanum est errare.'

I.

I'D vowed this month I'd dedicate
  To somewhat sterner metre ;—
My theme I'd 'strictly meditate,'
  And make mankind discreeter ;
Alas ! I have but proved again
  How plans and practice vary ;
I left the lyre and took the train—
  Humanum est errare !

II.

I said, to 'live laborious days'
One needs a change of diet,—
No man the 'spirit clear' can 'raise'
Without pure air and quiet;
I fancy now my Muse prefers
A climate *not* so airy;
You can't foresee these whims of hers—
Humanum est errare!

III.

'Tis plain that that austerer song,—
More anger's birth than pity's,—
Proceeds alone from men who long
Have drawn thick breath in cities;
And yet, who knows? This Muse of mine
May try some new vagary;—

I won't go back—for all the Nine—
  Humanum est errare!

IV.

But oh! for that misguided world
  Whom none can now enlighten,
Since I on shingly beach am curled,—
  Inglorious,—at Brighton!
Nor I alone, but here *you* are,—
  I wish you'd fan me, Mary,
And find me out a fresh cigar—
  Humanum est errare!

GROWING GRAY.

'On a l'âge de son cœur.'
A. D'HOUDETOT.

A LITTLE nearer toward the light;—
Me miserable! Here's one that's white;
And one that's turning;
Adieu to song and 'salad days;'
My Muse, let's go at once to Jay's,
And order mourning.

We must reform our rhymes, my Dear,—
Renounce the gay for the severe,—
Be grave, not witty;
We have, no more, the right to find
That Pyrrha's hair is neatly twined,—
That Chloe's pretty.

Young Love 's for us a farce that 's played ;
Light canzonet and serenade
    No more may tempt us ;
Gray hairs but ill accord with dreams ;
From aught but sour didactic themes
    Our years exempt us.

Indeed? You really fancy so?
You think for one white streak we grow
    At once satiric?
A fiddlestick ! Each hair's a string
To which our greybeard Muse shall sing
    A younger lyric.

The heart 's still sound. Shall ' cakes and ale '
Grow rare to youth because *we* rail
    At schoolboy dishes?
Perish the thought ! 'Tis ours to sing
When neither Time nor Tide can bring
    Belief with wishes.

LOVE IN WINTER.

Between the berried holly-bush
The Blackbird whistled to the Thrush:
'Which way did bright-eyed Bella go?
Look, Speckle-breast, across the snow,—
Are those her dainty tracks I see,
That wind beside the shrubbery?'

The Throstle pecked the berries still.
'No need for looking, Yellow-bill;
Young Frank was there an hour ago,
Half-frozen, waiting in the snow;
His callow beard was white with rime,—
Tchuck,—'tis a merry pairing-time!'

'What would you?' twittered in the Wren;
'These are the reckless ways of men.
I watched them bill and coo as though
They thought the sign of Spring was snow;
If men but timed their loves as we,
'Twould save this inconsistency.'

'Nay, Gossip,' chirped the Robin, 'nay;
I like their unreflective way.
Besides, I heard enough to show
Their love is proof against the snow:—
"Why wait," he said, "why wait for May,
When love can warm a winter's day?"'

POT-POURRI.

'Si jeunesse savait!—'

I PLUNGE my hand among the leaves:
(An alien touch but dust perceives,
    Nought else supposes;)
For me those fragrant ruins raise
Clear memory of the vanished days
    When they were roses.

'If youth but knew!' Ah, 'if,' in truth—
I can recall with what gay youth,
    To what light chorus,
Unsobered yet by time or change,
We roamed the many-gabled Grange,
    All life before us;

Braved the old clock-tower's dust and damp
To catch the dim Arthurian camp
    In misty distance;
Peered at the still-room's sacred stores,
Or rapped at walls for sliding doors
    Of feigned existence.

What need had we for thoughts or cares!
The hot sun parched the old parterres
    And 'flowerful closes;'
We roused the rooks with rounds and glees
Played hide-and-seek behind the trees,—
    Then plucked these roses.

Louise was one—light, glib Louise,
So freshly freed from school decrees
    You scarce could stop her;
And Bell, the Beauty, unsurprised
At fallen locks that scandalized
    Our dear 'Miss Proper:'—

Shy Ruth, all heart and tenderness,
Who wept—like Chaucer's Prioress,
When Dash was smitten;
Who blushed before the mildest men,
Yet waxed a very Corday when
You teased her kitten.

I loved them all. Bell first and best;
Louise the next—for days of jest,
Or madcap masking;
And Ruth, I thought,—why, failing these,
When my High-Mightiness should please,
She 'd come for asking.

. . . . .

Louise was grave when last we met;
Bell's beauty, like a sun, has set;
And Ruth, Heaven bless her,
Ruth that I wooed,—and wooed in vain,
Has gone where neither grief nor pain
Can now distress her.

DOROTHY.

A Rêverie suggested by the name upon a Pane.

She then must once have looked, as I
Look now, across the level rye,—
Past Church and Manor-house, and seen,
As now I see, the village green,
The bridge, and Walton's river—she
Whose old-world name was 'Dorothy.'

The swallows must have twittered, too,
Above her head; the roses blew
Below, no doubt,—and, sure, the South
Crept up the wall and kissed her mouth,—
That wistful mouth, which comes to me
Linked with her name of Dorothy.

What was she like? I picture her
Unmeet for uncouth worshipper;—
Soft,—pensive,—far too subtly graced
To suit the blunt bucolic taste,
Whose crude perception could but see
'Ma'am Fine-airs' in 'Miss Dorothy.'

How not? She loved, may be, perfume,
Soft textures, lace, a half-lit room;—
Perchance too candidly preferred
'Clarissa' to a gossip's word;—
And, for the rest, would seem to be
Or proud or dull—this Dorothy.

Poor child—with heart the down-lined nest
Of warmest instincts unconfest,
Soft, callow things that vaguely felt
The breeze caress, the sunlight melt,

But yet, by some obscure decree
Unwinged from birth ;—poor Dorothy !

Not less I dream her mute desire
To acred churl and booby squire,
Now pale, with timorous eyes that filled
At 'twice-told tales' of foxes killed ;—
Now trembling when slow tongues grew free
'Twixt sport, and Port—and Dorothy.

'Twas then she 'd seek this nook, and find
Its evening landscape balmy-kind ;
And here, where still her gentle name
Lives on the old green glass, would frame
Fond dreams of unfound harmony
'Twixt heart and heart. Poor Dorothy !

A CITY FLOWER.

'Il y a des fleurs animées.'
POLITE COLLOQUIALISM.

I.

To and fro in the City I go,
Tired of the ceaseless ebb and flow,
  Sick of the crowded mart;
Tired of the din and rattle of wheels,
Sick of the dust as one who feels
  The dust is over his heart.

II.

And again and again, as the sunlight wanes,
I think of the lights in the leafy lanes,
  With the bits of blue between;
And when about Rimmel's the perfumes play,
I smell no odour of 'Ess Bouquet,'
  But violets hid in the green;
And I love—how I love!—the plants that fill
The pots on my dust-dry window-sill,—
  A sensitive sickly crop,—
But a flower that charms me more, I think,
Than cowslip, or crocus, or rose, or pink,
  Blooms—in a milliner's shop.

III.

Hazel eyes that wickedly peep,
Flash, abash, and suddenly sleep
  Under the lids drawn in;

Ripple of hair that rioteth out,
Mouth with a half-born smile and a pout,
  And a baby breadth of chin;
Hands that light as the lighting bird,
On the bloom-bent bough, and the bough is
   stirred
  With a delicate ecstasy;
Fingers tipped with a roseate flush,
Flicking and flirting a feathery brush
  Over the papery bonnetry;—
Till the gauzy rose begins to glow,
And the gauzy hyacinths break and blow,
  And the dusty grape grows red;
And the flaunting grasses seem to say,
'Do we look like ornaments—tell us, we pray—
  Fit for a lady's head?'
And the butterfly wakes to a wiry life,
Like an elderly gentleman taking a wife,
  Knowing he must be gay;

And all the bonnets nid-noddle about,
Like chattering chaperons set at a rout,
Quarrelling over their play.

IV.

How can I otherwise choose than look
At the beautiful face like a beautiful book,
And learn a tiny part?
So I feel somehow that every day
Some flake of the dust is brushed away
That had settled over my heart.

INCOGNITA.

I.

Just for a space that I met her—
  Just for a day in the train!
It began when she feared it would wet her,
  That tiniest spurtle of rain:
So we tucked a great rug in the sashes,
  And carefully padded the pane;
And I sorrow in sackcloth and ashes,
  Longing to do it again!

II.

Then it grew when she begged me to reach her
  A dressing-case under the seat ;
She was 'really so tiny a creature,
  That she needed a stool for her feet !'
Which was promptly arranged to her order
  With a care that was even minute,
And a glimpse—of an open-work border,
  And a glance—of the fairyest boot.

III.

Then it drooped, and revived at some hovels—
  'Were they houses for men or for pigs ?'
Then it shifted to muscular novels,
  With a little digression on prigs :
She thought 'Wives and Daughters' '*so* jolly ;
  'Had I read it ?' She knew when I had,
Like the rest, I should dote upon 'Molly ;
  And 'poor Mrs. Gaskell—how sad !'

IV.

'Like Browning?' 'But so-so.' His proof lay
  Too deep for her frivolous mood,
That preferred your mere metrical *soufflé*
  To the stronger poetical food;
Yet at times he was good—'as a tonic:'
  Was Tennyson writing just now?
And was this new poet Byronic,
  And clever, and naughty, or how?

V.

Then we trifled with concerts and croquêt,
  Then she daintily dusted her face;
Then she sprinkled herself with 'Ess Bouquet,'
  Fished out from the foregoing case;
And we chattered of Gassier and Grisi,
  And voted Aunt Sally a bore;
Discussed if the tight rope were easy,
  Or Chopin much harder than Spohr.

VI.

And oh! the odd things that she quoted,
With the prettiest possible look,
And the price of two buns that she noted
In the prettiest possible book;
While her talk like a musical rillet
Flashed on with the hours that flew,
And the carriage, her smile seemed to fill it
With just enough summer—for Two.

VII.

Till at last in her corner, peeping
From a nest of rugs and of furs,
With the white shut eyelids sleeping
On those dangerous looks of hers,
She seemed like a snowdrop breaking,
Not wholly alive nor dead,
But with one blind impulse making
To the sounds of the spring overhead;

VIII.

And I watched in the lamplight's swerving
  The shade of the down-dropt lid,
And the lip-line's delicate curving,
  Where a slumbering smile lay hid,
Till I longed that, rather than sever,
  The train should shriek into space,
And carry us onward—for ever,—
  Me and that beautiful face.

IX.

But she suddenly woke in a fidget,
  With fears she was 'nearly at home,'
And talk of a certain Aunt Bridget,
  Whom I mentally wished—well at Rome;
Got out at the very next station,
  Looking back with a merry *Bon Soir*,
Adding, too, to my utter vexation,
  A surplus, unkind *Au Revoir*.

X.

So left me to muse on her graces,
  To doze and to muse, till I dreamed
That we sailed through the sunniest places
  In a glorified galley, it seemed;
But the cabin was made of a carriage,
  And the ocean was Eau-de-Cologne,
And we split on a rock labelled MARRIAGE,
  And I woke,—as cold as a stone.

XI.

And that's how I lost her—a jewel—
  Incognita—one in a crowd,
Not prudent enough to be cruel,
  Not worldly enough to be proud.
It was just a shut lid and its lashes,
  Just a few hours in a train,
And I sorrow in sackcloth and ashes
  Longing to see her again!

MY LANDLADY.

A SMALL brisk woman, capped with many a bow;
  'Yes,' so she says, 'and younger, too, than some,'
Who bids me, bustling, 'God speed,' when I go,
  And gives me, rustling, 'Welcome' when I come.

'Ay, sir, 'tis cold,—and freezing hard,—they say;
  I 'd like to give that hulking brute a hit
Beating his horse in such a shameful way!—
  Step here, sir, till your fire 's blazed up a bit.'

A musky haunt of lavender and shells,
Quaint-figured Chinese monsters, toys, and trays—
A life's collection—where each object tells
Of fashions gone and half-forgotten ways :—

A glossy screen, where wide-mouth dragons ramp;
A vexed inscription in a sampler-frame ;
A shade of beads upon a red-capped lamp ;
A child's mug graven with a golden name ;

A pictured ship, with full-blown canvas set ;
A card, with sea-weed twisted to a wreath,
Circling a silky curl as black as jet,
With yellow writing faded underneath.

Looking, I sink within the shrouded chair,
And note the objects slowly, one by one,
And light at last upon a portrait there,—
Wide-collared, raven-haired. 'Yes, 'tis my son!'

'Where is he?' 'Ah, Sir, he is dead—my boy!
  Nigh ten long years ago—in 'sixty-three;
He's always living in my head—my boy!
  He was left drowning in the Southern Sea.

'There were two souls washed overboard, they said,
  And one the waves brought back; but he was left.
They saw him place the life-buoy o'er his head;
  The sea was running wildly;—he was left.

'He was a strong, strong swimmer. Do you know,
  When the wind whistled yesternight, I cried,
And prayed to God,—though 'twas so long ago,—
  He did not struggle much before he died.

''Twas his third voyage. That's the box he brought,—
  Or would have brought—my poor deserted boy!
And these the words the agents sent—they thought
  That money, perhaps, could make my loss a joy.

‘ Look, Sir, I ’ve something here that I prize more :
  This is a fragment of the poor lad’s coat,—
That other clutched him as the wave went o’er,
  And this stayed in his hand. That ’s what they wrote.

‘ Well, well, ’tis done. My story’s shocking you ;—
  Grief is for them that have both time and wealth :
We can’t mourn much, who have much work to do ;
  Your fire is bright. Thank God, I have my health !

THE DRAMA OF THE DOCTOR'S WINDOW.

IN THREE ACTS, WITH A PROLOGUE.

'A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus,
And his love Thisbe; very tragical mirth.'

MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM.

PROLOGUE.

I.

'WELL, I must wait!' The Doctor's room,
Where I used this expression,
Wore the severe official gloom
Attached to that profession;
Rendered severer by a bald
And skinless Gladiator,
Whose raw robustness first appalled
The entering spectator.

II.

No one would call 'The Lancet' gay,—
Few could avoid confessing
That Jones, 'On Muscular Decay,'
Is, as a rule, depressing:
So, leaving both, to change the scene,
I turned toward the shutter,
And peered out vacantly between
A water-butt and gutter.

III.

Below, the Doctor's garden lay,
If thus imagination
May dignify a square of clay
Unused to vegetation,
Filled with a dismal-looking swing—
That brought to mind a gallows—
An empty kennel, mouldering,
And two dyspeptic aloes.

IV.

No sparrow chirped, no daisy sprung,
About the place deserted ;
Only across the swing-board hung
A battered doll, inverted,
Which sadly seemed to disconcert
The vagrant cat that scanned it,
Sniffed doubtfully around the skirt,
But failed to understand it.

V.

A dreary spot ! And yet, I own,
Half-hoping that, perchance, it
Might, in some unknown way, atone
For Jones and for 'The Lancet,'
I watched ; and by especial grace,
Within this stage contracted,
Saw presently before my face
A classic story acted.

VI.

Ah, World of ours, are you so gray
And weary, World, of spinning,
That you repeat the tales to-day
You told at the beginning?
For lo! the same old myths that made
The early 'stage successes,'
Still 'hold the boards,' and still are played
'With new effects and dresses.'

VII.

Small, lonely 'three-pair-backs' behold,
To-day, Alcestis dying;
To-day, in farthest Polar cold,
Ulysses' bones are lying;
Still in one's morning 'Times' one reads
How fell an Indian Hector;
Still clubs discuss Achilles' steeds,
Briseis' next protector;—

VIII.

Still Menelaus brings, we see,
  His oft-remanded case on;
Still somewhere sad Hypsipyle
  Bewails a faithless Jason;
And here, the Doctor's sill beside,
  Do I not now discover
A Thisbe, whom the walls divide
  From Pyramus, her lover?

ACT THE FIRST.

IX.

Act I. began. Some noise had scared
  The cat, that like an arrow
Shot up the wall and disappeared;
  And then across the narrow,
Unweeded path, a small dark thing,
  Hid by a garden-bonnet,

Passed wearily towards the swing,
  Paused, turned, and climbed upon it.

X.

A child of five, with eyes that were
  At least a decade older,
A mournful mouth, and tangled hair
  Flung careless round her shoulder,
Dressed in a stiff ill-fitting frock,
  Whose black uncomely rigour
Seemed to sardonically mock
  The plaintive, slender figure.

XI.

What was it? Something in the dress
  That told the girl unmothered;
Or was it that the merciless
  Black garb of mourning smothered

Life and all light :—but rocking so,
  In the dull garden-corner,
The lonely swinger seemed to grow
  More piteous and forlorner.

XII.

Then, as I looked, across the wall
  Of 'next-door's' garden, that is—
To speak correctly—through its tall
  Surmounting fence of lattice,
Peeped a boy's face, with curling hair,
  Ripe lips, half-drawn asunder,
And round, bright eyes, that wore a stare
  Of frankest childish wonder.

XIII.

Rounder they grew by slow degrees,
  Until the swinger, swerving,
Made, all at once, alive to these
  Intentest orbs observing,

Gave just one brief, half-uttered cry,
  And,—as with gathered kirtle,
Nymphs fly from Pan's head suddenly
  Thrust through the budding myrtle,—

XIV.

Fled in dismay. A moment's space,
  The eyes looked almost tragic;
Then, when they caught my watching face,
  Vanished as if by magic;
And, like some sombre thing beguiled
  To strange, unwonted laughter,
The gloomy garden having smiled,
  Became the gloomier after.

ACT THE SECOND.

XV.

Yes: they were gone, the stage was bare,—
  Blank as before; and therefore,

Sinking within the patient's chair,
  Half vexed, I knew not wherefore,
I dozed ; till, startled by some call,
  A glance sufficed to show me,
The boy again above the wall,
  The girl erect below me.

XVI.

The boy, it seemed, to add a force
  To words found unavailing,
Had pushed a striped and spotted horse
  Half through the blistered paling,
Where now it stuck, stiff-legged and straight,
  While he, in exultation,
Chattered some half-articulate
  Excited explanation.

XVII.

Meanwhile, the girl, with upturned face,
  Stood motionless, and listened ;

The ill-cut frock had gained a grace,
  The pale hair almost glistened;
The figure looked alert and bright,
  Buoyant as though some power
Had lifted it, as rain at night
  Uplifts a drooping flower.

XVIII.

The eyes had lost their listless way,—
  The old life, tired and faded,
Had slipped down with the doll that lay
  Before her feet, degraded;
She only, yearning upward, found
  In those bright eyes above her
The ghost of some enchanted ground
  Where even Nurse would love her.

XIX.

Ah, tyrant Time! you hold the book,
  We, sick and sad, begin it;

You close it fast, if we but look
  Pleased for a meagre minute;
You closed it now, for, out of sight,
  Some warning finger beckoned;
Exeunt both to left and right;—
  Thus ended Act the Second.

ACT THE THIRD.

XX.

Or so it proved. For while I still
  Believed them gone for ever,
Half-raised above the window sill,
  I saw the lattice quiver;
And lo, once more appeared the head,
  Flushed, while the round mouth pouted;
'Give Tom a kiss,' the red lips said,
  In style the most undoubted.

XXI.

The girl came back without a thought;
Dear Muse of Mayfair, pardon,
If more restraint had not been taught
In this neglected garden;
For these your code was all too stiff,
So, seeing none dissented,
Their unfeigned faces met as if
Manners were not invented.

XXII.

Then on the scene,—by happy fate,
When lip from lip had parted,
And, therefore, just two seconds late,—
A sharp-faced nurse-maid darted;
Swooped on the boy, as swoops a kite
Upon a rover chicken,
And bore him sourly off, despite
His well-directed kicking.

XXIII.

The girl stood silent, with a look
  Too subtle to unravel,
Then, with a sudden gesture took
  The torn doll from the gravel;
Hid the whole face, with one caress,
  Under the garden bonnet,
And, passing in, I saw her press
  Kiss after kiss upon it.

Exeunt omnes. End of play.
  It made the dull room brighter,
The Gladiator almost gay,
  And e'en 'The Lancet' lighter.

AN UNFINISHED SONG.

'Cantat Deo qui vivit Deo.'

Yes, he was well-nigh gone and near his rest,
  The year could not renew him; nor the cry
Of building nightingales about the nest;
  Nor that soft freshness of the May-wind's sigh,

That fell before the garden scents, and died
  Between the ampler leafage of the trees:
All these he knew not, lying open-eyed,
  Deep in a dream that was not pain nor ease,

But death not yet. Outside a woman talked—
His wife she was—whose clicking needles sped
To faded phrases of complaint that balked
My rising words of comfort. Overhead,

A cage that hung amid the jasmine stars
Trembled a little, and a blossom dropped.
Then notes came pouring through the wicker bars,
Climbed half a rapid arc of song, and stopped.

'Is it a thrush?' I asked. 'A thrush,' she said.
'That was Will's tune. Will taught him that before
He left the doorway settle for his bed,
Sick as you see, and couldn't teach him more.

'He'd bring his Bible here o' nights, would Will,
Following the light, and whiles when it was dark
And days were warm, he'd sit there whistling still,
Teaching the bird. He whistled like a lark.'

'Jack! Jack!' A joyous flutter stirred the cage,
  Shaking the blossoms down. The bird began;
The woman turned again to want and wage,
  And in the inner chamber sighed the man.

How clear the song was! Musing as I heard,
  My fancies wandered from the droning wife
To sad comparison of man and bird,—
  The broken song, the uncompleted life,

That seemed a broken song; and of the two,
  My thought a moment deemed the bird more blest,
That, when the sun shone, sang the notes it knew,
  Without desire or knowledge of the rest.

Nay, happier man. For him futurity
  Still hides a hope that this his earthly praise
Finds heavenly end, for surely will not He,
  Solver of all, above his Flower of Days,

Teach him the song that no one living knows?
Let the man die, with that half-chant of his,—
What Now discovers not Hereafter shows,
And God will surely teach him more than this.

Again the bird. I turned, and passed along;
But Time and Death, Eternity and Change,
Talked with me ever, and the climbing song
Rose in my hearing, beautiful and strange.

THE SUNDIAL.

'TIS an old dial, dark with many a stain;
  In summer crowned with drifting orchard bloom,
Tricked in the autumn with the yellow rain,
  And white in winter like a marble tomb;

And round about its gray, time-eaten brow
  Lean letters speak—a worn and shattered row:
I am a Shade: a Shadowe too arte thou:
  I marke the Time: saye, Gossip, dost thou soe?

Here would the ringdoves linger, head to head;
And here the snail a silver course would run,
Beating old Time; and here the peacock spread
His gold-green glory, shutting out the sun.

* * * * *

The tardy shade moved forward to the noon;
Betwixt the paths a dainty Beauty stept,
That swung a flower, and, smiling, hummed a tune,—
Before whose feet a barking spaniel leapt.

O'er her blue dress an endless blossom strayed;
About her tendril-curls the sunlight shone;
And round her train the tiger-lilies swayed,
Like courtiers bowing till the queen be gone.

She leaned upon the slab a little while,
Then drew a jewelled pencil from her zone,

Scribbled a something with a frolic smile,
  Folded, inscribed, and niched it in the stone.

* * * * *

The shade slipped on, no swifter than the snail;
  There came a second lady to the place,
Dove-eyed, dove-robed, and something wan and
    pale—
  An inner beauty shining from her face.

She, as if listless with a lonely love,
  Straying among the alleys with a book,—
Herrick or Herbert,—watched the circling dove,
  And spied the tiny letter in the nook.

Then, like to one who confirmation found
  Of some dread secret half-accounted true,—
Who knew what hands and hearts the letter bound,
  And argued loving commerce 'twixt the two,

She bent her fair young forehead on the stone;
  The dark shade gloomed an instant on her head;
And 'twixt her taper-fingers pearled and shone
  The single tear that tear-worn eyes will shed.

* * * * *

The shade slipped onward to the falling gloom;
  There came a soldier gallant in her stead,
Swinging a beaver with a swaling plume,
  A ribboned love-lock rippling from his head;

Blue-eyed, frank-faced, with clear and open brow,
  Scar-seamed a little, as the women love;
So kindly fronted that you marvelled how
  The frequent sword-hilt had so frayed his glove

Who switched at Psyche plunging in the sun;
  Uncrowned three lilies with a backward swinge;
And standing somewhat widely, like to one
  More used to 'Boot and Saddle' than to cringe

As courtiers do, but gentleman withal,
  Took out the note ;—held it as one who feared
The fragile thing he held would slip and fall ;
  Read and re-read, pulling his tawny beard ;

Kissed it, I think, and hid it in his breast ;
  Laughed softly in a flattered happy way,
Arranged the broidered baldrick on his chest,
  And sauntered past, singing a roundelay.

*   *   *   *   *

The shade crept forward through the dying glow ;
  There came no more nor dame nor cavalier ;
But for a little time the brass will show
  A small gray spot—the record of a tear.

THE SICK MAN AND THE BIRDS.

ÆGROTUS.

SPRING,—art thou come, O Spring!
  I am too sick for words;
How hast thou heart to sing,
  O Spring, with all thy birds?

MERULA.

I sing for joy to see again
The merry leaves along the lane,
  The little bud grown ripe;
And look, my love upon the bough!
Hark, how she calleth to me now,—
                    'Pipe! pipe!'

ÆGROTUS.

Ah! weary is the sun:
  Love is an idle thing;
But, Bird, thou restless one,
  What ails thee, wandering?

HIRUNDO.

By shore and sea I come and go
To seek I know not what; and lo!
  On no man's eaves I sit
But voices bid me rise once more,
To flit again by sea and shore,—
          Flit! Flit!

ÆGROTUS.

This is Earth's bitter cup:—
  Only to seek, not know.
But Thou, that strivest up,
  Why dost thou carol so?

ALAUDA.

A secret Spirit gifteth me
With song, and wing that lifteth me,—
  A Spirit for whose sake,
Striving amain to reach the sky,
Still to the old dark earth I cry—
                    'Wake! wake!'

ÆGROTUS.

My hope hath lost its wing.
  Thou, that to Night dost call,
How hast thou heart to sing
  Thy tears made musical?

PHILOMELA.

Alas for me! a dry desire
Is all my song,—a waste of fire
  That will not fade nor fail;
To me, dim shapes of ancient crime
Moan through the windy ways of time,
                    'Wail! wail!'

ÆGROTUS.

Thine is the sick man's song,—
  Mournful, in sooth, and fit;
Unrest that cries 'How long!'—
  And the Night answers it.

THE DEATH OF PROCRIS.

A VERSION SUGGESTED BY THE SO-NAMED PICTURE OF PIERO DI COSIMO, IN THE NATIONAL GALLERY.

PROCRIS, the nymph, had wedded Cephalus ;—
He, till the spring had warmed to slow-winged days,
Heavy with June, untired and amorous,
Named her his love ; but now, in unknown ways,
His heart was gone ; and evermore his gaze
Turned from her own, and ever farther ranged
His woodland war ; while she, in dull amaze,
Beholding with the hours her husband changed,
Sighed for his lost caress, by some hard god estranged.

So, on a day, she rose and found him not.
Alone, with wet, sad eye, she watched the shade
Brighten below a soft-rayed sun that shot
Arrows of light through all the deep-leaved glade;
Then, with weak hands, she knotted up the braid
Of her brown hair, and o'er her shoulders cast
Her crimson weed; with faltering fingers made
Her golden girdle's clasp to join, and past
Down to the trackless wood, full pale and overcast.

And all day long her slight spear devious flew,
And harmless swerved her arrows from their aim,
For ever, as the ivory bow she drew,
Before her ran the still unwounded game.
Then, at the last, a hunter's cry there came,
And, lo, a hart that panted with the chase,
Thereat her cheek was lightened as with flame,
And swift she gat her to a leafy place,
Thinking, 'I yet may chance unseen to see his face.'

Leaping he went, this hunter Cephalus,
Bent in his hand his cornel bow he bare,
Supple he was, round-limbed and vigorous,
Fleet as his dogs, a lean Laconian pair.
He, when he spied the brown of Procris' hair
Move in the covert, deeming that apart
Some fawn lay hidden, loosed an arrow there;
Nor cared to turn and seek the speeded dart,
Bounding above the fern, fast following up the hart.

But Procris lay among the white wind-flowers,
Shot in the throat. From out the little wound
The slow blood drained, as drops in autumn showers
Drip from the leaves upon the sodden ground.
None saw her die but Lelaps, the swift hound,
That watched her dumbly with a wistful fear,
Till, at the dawn, the hornèd wood-men found
And bore her gently on a sylvan bier,
To lie beside the sea,—with many an uncouth tear.

PALOMYDES.

I.

HIM best in all the dim Arthuriad,
  Of lovers of fair women, him I prize,—
The Pagan Palomydes. Never glad
  Was he with sweetness of his lady's eyes,
    Nor joy he had.

II.

But, unloved ever, still must love the same,
  And riding ever through a lonely world,
Whene'er on adverse shield or crest he came,
  Against the danger desperately hurled,
    Crying her name.

III.

So I, who strove to You I may not earn,
  Methinks, am come unto so high a place,
That though from hence I can but vainly yearn
  For that averted favour of your face,
    I shall not turn.

IV.

No, I am come too high. Whate'er betide,
  To find the doubtful thing that fights with me,
Toward the mountain tops I still shall ride,
  And cry your name in my extremity,
    As Palomyde,

V.

Until the issue come. Will it disclose
  No gift of grace, no pity made complete,
After much labour done,—much war with woes?
  Will you deny me still in Heaven, my Sweet;—
    Ah, Death—who knows?

A SONG OF ANGIOLA ON EARTH.

THIS is my Lady's throne :—
  Among green leaves, in bowers
    From sunlight fenced with care
By great boughs overgrown ;
  Her feet are deep in flowers,
    They fall around her hair ;
There is no bird nor sylvan thing
But stays to listen, if she sing
    Before I seek her there.

This is my Lady's face :—
  A cloud of yellow hair
    Stands round about her ear ;

She hath a mouth of grace,
  A forehead white and fair,
    And blue eyes very clear;
Lids that go over while I see,
And shut the world away from me,
    Because she is so dear.

This is my Lady's dress :—
  In fine silk fairly fit,
    Blue as an egg is she;
Broad bands her shoulders press
  With dark devices knit,
    And small pearls curiously.
A silver girdle holds her waist,
Whereon these words are rightly traced :—
    A true man taketh me.

This is my Lady's name :—
  It is as soft as air,
    As sweet as is the rose;

No other sounds the same,
No song is half so fair,
No music's dying close ;—
But yet, methinks, 'twere sin to say
My Lady's name in open day
For him to speak who knows.

This is my Lady's praise :—
Shame before her is shamed,
Hate cannot hate repeat ;
She is so pure of ways
There is no sin is named
But falls before her feet ;
Because she is so frankly free,
So tender and so good to see,
Because she is so sweet.

This is my love of her :—
It waxeth ever new,
Nor waneth any whit ;

This all my heart doth stir,
Just that I may be true,
And as she findeth fit;
There is no thing she bids me do
But I would die to bear it through
Because she asketh it.

Sweet-swelling song of mine,
Take cassia, balm, and nard;
Then hie thee fast with care,
Find out my Lady sweet,
With delicate white feet:
Before her feet incline,
And kiss them—kiss them hard,
And wipe them with thine hair,
Saying 'My Master bids thee know,
Madonna, that he greets thee so,
Seeing thou art so fair.'

A FLOWER SONG OF ANGIOLA.

Down where the garden grows,
  Gay as a banner,
Spake to her mate the Rose
  After this manner:—
'We are the first of flowers,
  Plain-land or hilly,
All reds and whites are ours,
  Are they not, Lily?'

Then to the flowers I spake,—
  'Watch ye my Lady
Gone to the leafy brake,
  Silent and shady;

When I am near to her,
  Lily, she knows;
How I am dear to her,
  Look to it, Rose.'

Straightway the Blue-bell stooped,
  Paler for pride,
Down where the Violet drooped,
  Shy, at her side :—
'Sweetheart, save me and you,
  Where has the summer kist
Flowers of as fair a hue,—
  Turkis or Amethyst?'

Therewith I laughed aloud,
  Spake on this wise,
'O little flowers so proud,
  Have ye seen eyes

Change through the blue in them,—
  Change till the mere
Loving that grew in them
  Turned to a tear?'

'Flowers, ye are bright of hue,
  Delicate, sweet;
Flowers, and the sight of you
  Lightens men's feet;
Yea; but her worth to me,
  Flowerets, even,
Sweetening the earth to me,
  Sweeteneth heaven.

This, then, O Flowers, I sing;
  God, when He made ye
Made yet a fairer thing
  Making my Lady;—

Fashioned her tenderly,
  Giving all weal to her ;—
Girdle ye slenderly,
  Go to her, kneel to her,—

Saying, " He sendeth us,
  He the most dutiful ;
Meetly he endeth us,
  Maiden most beautiful !
Let us get rest of you,
  Sweet, in your breast ;—
Die, being prest of you,
  Die, being blest."'

A SONG OF ANGIOLA DEAD.

SONG, art thou sad, my Song?
Thou hast not ease nor sleep,
Thou art not gay nor glad;
Hast thou not mourned too long?
Speak to me, song, nor weep
Till thou grow gray and mad
For that all Love is fled,
Beauty and bountihed;—
Song, thou art sad.

Song, ah how fair was she !—
  Days but her praise repeat ;—
    Men may seek out with care
Nowhere such eyes to see,
  Nowhere such little feet,—
    Yea, and such yellow hair ;
Nowhere like lips, I weet
Kisses thereon to eat ;—
      Song, she was fair !

Song, and how sweet she was !
  Spring breezes kissed her face,
    Little leaves kissed her feet,
And the sun kissed, because
  Nowhere in any place
    Thing was to kiss so sweet ;
Nothing so dear as she,
Gentle and maidenly ;—
      Song, she was sweet !

Song, but how good she was!
There was no word she said,
But it was wise and good;
No abject thing but has
Out from her mercy fed,
Strong in her pity stood;
There was no little child
But to her leapt and smiled;—
Song, she was good!

How shall we wait, my song?
There is no mirth in cup,
Nowhere a feast is spread;
Life is all marred and wrong,
Grief hath consumed it up,
Now that our Love is fled
Earth hath no face to see
Pointing my sword for me;—
Song, she is dead!

Shall not we leave to sing?
  Nothing can wake her now,
    Nothing can lift her head;
There is no tune can bring
  Back to her cheek and brow
    Roses of white and red;
Nothing of ours can stir
Words on the lips of her;—
      Song, she is dead!

Cease then from scent, my song,
  Change thee thy myrrh for rue,
    Myrtle for calamus;
Bring for us garments long,
  Weeds to our grief, and strew
    Dust on the hair of us,
For that all Love is fled,
Beauty and bountihed;—
      Song, she is dead!

A SONG OF ANGIOLA IN HEAVEN.

FLOWERS,—that have died upon my Sweet
Lulled by the rhythmic dancing beat
  Of her young bosom under you,—
Now will I show you such a thing
As never, through thick buds of Spring,
  Betwixt the daylight and the dew,
The Bird whose being no man knows—
  The voice that waketh all night through,
      Tells to the Rose.

For lo,—a garden-place I found,
Well filled of leaves, and stilled of sound,
  Well flowered, with red fruit marvellous ;
And 'twixt the shining trunks would flit
Tall knights and silken maids, or sit
  With faces bent and amorous ;—
There, in the heart thereof, and crowned
  With woodbine and amaracus,
      My Love I found.

Alone she walked,—ah, well I wis,
My heart leapt up for joy of this !—
  Then when I called to her her name,—
The name, that like a pleasant thing
Men's lips remember, murmuring,
  At once across the sward she came,—
Full fain she seemed, my own dear maid,
  And askèd ever as she came,
      'Where hast thou stayed ?'

'Where hast thou stayed?'—she asked as though
The long years were an hour ago;
  But I spake not, nor answerèd,
For, looking in her eyes, I saw,
A light not lit of mortal law;
  And in her clear cheeks' changeless red,
And sweet, unshaken speaking found
  That in this place the Hours were dead,
          And Time was bound.

'This is well done,'—she said,—'in thee,
O Love, that thou art come to me,
  To this green garden glorious;
Now truly shall our life be sped
In joyance and all goodlihed,
  For here all things are fair to us,
And none with burden is oppressed,
  And none is poor or piteous,—
          For here is Rest.

'No formless Future blurs the sky;
Men mourn not here, with dull dead eye,
By shrouded shapes of Yesterday;
Betwixt the Coming and the Past
The flawless life hangs fixen fast
In one unwearying To-Day,
That darkens not; for Sin is shriven,
Death from the doors is thrust away,
And here is Heaven.'

At 'Heaven' she ceased;—and lifted up
Her fair head like a flower-cup,
With rounded mouth, and eyes aglow;
Then set I lips to hers, and felt,—
Ah, God,—the hard pain fade and melt,
And past things change to painted show;
The song of quiring birds outbroke;
The lit leaves laughed,—sky shook, and *lo*,
I swooned,—and woke.

And now, O Flowers,
—Ye that indeed are dead,—
Now for all waiting hours,
Well am I comforted;
For of a surety, now, I see,
That, without dim distress
Of tears, or weariness,
My Lady, verily, awaiteth me;
So that until with Her I be,
For my dear Lady's sake
I am right fain to make
Out from my pain a pillow, and to take
Grief for a golden garment unto me;
Knowing that I, at last, shall stand
In that green garden-land,
And, in the holding of my dear Love's hand,
Forget the grieving and the misery.

THE DYING OF TANNEGUY DU BOIS.

'En los nidas antaño no hay pajaros hogaño.'

LAST WORDS OF DON QUIXOTE.

YEA, I am passed away, I think, from this ;
  Nor helps me herb, nor any leechcraft here,
But lift me hither the sweet cross to kiss,
  And witness ye, I go without a fear.
Yea, I am sped, and never more shall see,
  As once I dreamed, the show of shield and crest,
Gone southward to the fighting by the sea ;—
  There is no bird in any last year's nest!

Yea, with me now all dreams are done, I ween,
Grown faint and unremembered; voices call
High up, like misty warders dimly seen
Moving at morn on some Burgundian wall;
And all things swim—as when the charger stands
Quivering between the knees, and East and West
Are filled with flash of scarves and waving hands;—
There is no bird in any last year's nest!

Is she a dream I left in Acquitaine?—
My wife Giselle,—who never spoke a word,
Although I knew her mouth was drawn with pain,
Her eyelids hung with tears; and though I heard
The strong sob shake her throat, and saw the cord
Her necklace made about it;—she that prest
To watch me trotting till I reached the ford;—
There is no bird in any last year's nest.

Ah ! I had hoped, God wot,—had longed that she
  Should watch me from the little-lit tourelle,
Me, coming riding by the windy lea—
  Me, coming back again to her, Giselle ;
Yea, I had hoped once more to hear him call,
  The curly-pate, who, rushen lance in rest,
Stormed at the lilies by the orchard wall ;—
  There is no bird in any last year's nest !

But how, my Masters, ye are wrapt in gloom !
  This Death will come, and whom he loves he cleaves
Sheer through the steel and leather ; hating whom
  He smites in shameful wise behind the greaves.
'Tis a fair time with Dennis and the Saints,
  And weary work to age, and want for rest,
When harness groweth heavy, and one faints,
  With no bird left in any last year's nest !

Give ye good hap, then, all. For me, I lie
Broken in Christ's sweet hand, with whom shall rest
To keep me living, now that I must die;—
There is no bird in any last year's nest!

LOVE'S QUEST.

(FOR A MURAL PAINTING.)

WHENAS the watches of the night had grown
  To that deep loneliness where dreams begin,
  I saw how Love, with visage worn and thin,
With wings close-bound, went through a town *alone*.
Death-pale he showed, and inly seemed to moan
  With sore desire some dolorous place to win;
  Sharp brambles passed had streaked his dazzling
    skin,—
His bright feet eke were gashed with many a stone.

And, as he went, I, sad for piteousness,
Might see how men from door and gate would move
To stay his steps; or womankind would press,
With wistful eyes, to balconies above,
And bid him enter in. But Love not less,
Mournful, kept on his way. Ah, hapless Love!

THE PEACOCK ON THE WALL.

A MEDIÆVAL BALLAD, IN THE MODERN MANNER.

A DOUGHTY knight was Hue le Beau,
  A flower of men, perfay,
A gentle squire of dames also
  In his peculiar way.

I say 'peculiar,' for in truth,
  According to his view,
Men must have had eternal youth—
  Or nothing else to do.

He held that but when years had past
  In courtesies minute,
His love should yield herself at last
  To his protracted suit.

Culture, he urged, could love extend
  To lengths so undefined
A man might quite a lifetime spend
  Before he spoke his mind.

Alix le Fay was straight and tall,
  A maid of high degree;
And by her father's orchard wall
  He met her,—frequently.

These were the merely prologue days,
  And on her lily cheek,
Sir Hue, for quite three hours, would gaze,
  But not a word would speak;

Then, feeling first to ascertain
  Whether the grass was wet,
This blameless knight and man was fain
  Upon his knees to get;

And lifting up her fingers two,
  With gentle gesture, he
Would lay his bearded lip thereto
  And kiss,—respectfully.

Seven years Sir Hue had gazed and kissed,
  In this enlightened wise,
And only on Saints' days had missed
  His usual exercise;—

Seven years Sir Hue had kissed and gazed,
  And in no detail swerved,
Till he, one afternoon,—amazed,
  Perceived he was observed.

For lo, upon the orchard wall,
A Peacock-bird would rest,
That seemed to watch his motions all
With wonder manifest.

'Sir Knight,'—(at once began the bird),
'Though I appear abrupt,
Believe me that it ne'er occurred
To me to interrupt.

'Fair is the path of virtue traced
By men of low estate,
Much more, ennobled by the taste
And fancy of the great.

'A courtship, so refined, sedate
And singular in kind,
Could hardly fail to captivate
The well-conducted mind.

'Good hap, the highest and the least
   Can admiration stir,
And make of either bird or beast,
   A Hero-worshipper;

'So I,—a bird—can yet revere
   The Beautiful—the True;—
Permit me then, I pray, Messire,
   To join your party too,

'For you, I feel, will understand
   To closely contemplate
A suit so delicately planned,
   Must surely elevate.'

The Knight could not refuse request
   So gracefully preferred:
Thence, as the long amour progressed
   The blandly curious bird

Watched from the wall the varied shades
  Of 'Sweetness' and of 'Light,'
As good Sir Hue went through the grades
  Of Passion grown polite.

But, long ere Alix made him hers
  Departing from its post,
The Peacock, being full of years,
  Had yielded up the ghost;

And after, when Sir Hue the maid
  By slow degrees had gained,
He had the circumstance portrayed
  Upon a window stained,

Showing himself, Alix le Fay,
  The Peacock watching by;
'And there it stands unto this day
  To witness if I lie.'

L' ENVOI

(TO THE FIRST EDITION.)

Go, little Book, on this thy first emprize:
If that thou 'scape the critic Ogre-land,
And come to where young Beauty, with bright eyes,
Listless at noon, shall take thee in her hand,
Tell her that nought in thy poor Master stirs
Of art, or grace, or song,—that is not Hers.

October 1873.

NOTES.

NOTE I, PAGE 34.

An Incident in the Life of François Boucher.

See *Boucher* by Arsène Houssaye, *Galerie du* XVIIIE *Siècle* (*Cinquième Série; Sculpteurs, Peintres, Musiciens*). The 'incident' is, however, thus briefly referred to in Charles Blanc's *Histoire des Peintres de tous les Écoles*:—'*Une fois cependant Boucher se laissa prendre à un amour simple et candide. Un jour, en passant dans la Rue Ste.-Anne, il aperçut une jeune fruitière dont la beauté l'éblouit. C'était au temps des cerises. Le peintre la regarda et elle se laissa regarder sans songer à ses paniers. Ses lèvres parurent plus belles que ses cerises. Un amour naïf et tendre naquit de cette échange de regards; Boucher y trouva quelques jours de délices; Rosine y trouva la mort après une rapide bonheur.*'

NOTE 2, PAGE 34.

The scene, a wood.

The picture referred to is *Le Panier Mystérieux* by F. Boucher; engraved by R. Gaillard.

NOTE 3, PAGE 36.

And far afield were sun-baked savage creatures.

See *Les Caractères de* LA BRUYÈRE, *De l'homme.*

NOTE 4, PAGE 36.

Whose greatest grace was jupes à la Camargo.

'*C'était le beau temps où Camargo trouvait ses jupes trop longues pour danser la gargouillade.*'—ARSÈNE HOUSSAYE.

NOTE 5, PAGE 37.

The grass he called 'too green.'

'*Il trouvait la nature trop verte et mal éclairée. Et son ami Lancret, le peintre des salons à la mode, lui répondait: "Je suis de votre sentiment, la nature manque d'harmonie et de séduction."*'—CHARLES BLANC.

NOTE 6, PAGE 38.

Fresh as a fresh young pear-tree blossoming.

'She was wel more blisful on to see
Than is the newe perjenete tree.'
CHAUCER, *The Millere's Tale.*

NOTE 7, PAGE 47.

A Revolutionary Relic.

'373. ST. PIERRE (Bernardin de), *Paul et Virginie*, 12mo, old calf. Paris, 1787. This copy is pierced throughout by a bullet-hole, and bears on one of the covers the words:—"*à Lucile St. A. . . . chez M. Batemans, à Edmonds-Bury, en Angleterre*," very faintly written in pencil.'—(Extract from Catalogue.)

NOTE 8, PAGE 51.

Did she wander like that other?

Lucile Desmoulins. See Carlyle's *French Revolution*, Book VI. chap. ii.

NOTE 9, PAGE 53.

And its tender rain shall lave it.

It is by no means uncommon for an editor to interrupt some of these Revolutionary letters by a 'Here there are traces of tears.'

NOTE 10, PAGE 173.

I am a Shade: a Shadowe too art thou:
I marke the Time: saye, Gossip, dost thou soe?

A motto in this spirit occurs at Stirling.

NOTE 11, PAGE 187.

A Song of Angiola on Earth.

It is perhaps scarcely necessary to state that this and the three pieces that follow owe their form and existence to the beautiful renderings of the Early Italian Poets (1100–1200–1300), by Mr. D. G. Rossetti, published in 1861.

NOTE 12, PAGE 199.

Flowers,—that have died upon my Sweet.

See *A Flower-Song of Angiola*, p. 191.



THE END.

EDINBURGH : T. AND A. CONSTABLE,
PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN, AND TO THE UNIVERSITY.



